Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization?: A Test of the "Bread and Democracy" Thesis and the Case of Prussia

Daniel Ziblatt

WORLD
POLITICS
A Quarterly Journal of
International Relations

Volume 64, Number 2   April 2012

→ For additional information about this article

DOES LANDHOLDING INEQUALITY BLOCK DEMOCRATIZATION?
A Test of the "Bread and Democracy" Thesis and the Case of Prussia

By DANIEL ZIBLATT*

INTRODUCTION

DOES landholding inequality block democratization? This classic question in the study of political regimes concerned Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, and Alexander Gerschenkron. It is also a question that has recently attracted the attention of leading "new structural" political economists interested in the sources of regime change.[1] Echoing Gerschenkron's evocatively titled *Bread and Democracy in Germany*,[2] these scholars have returned to the question of how preindustrial patterns of inequality—namely, *landholding* inequality—might exert an enduring and underappreciated effect on the chances for democratic transitions.[3] The new literature utilizes the most advanced tools of political economy to examine historical and contemporary cases of democratization, generating competing accounts of how the preexisting distribution and mobility of economic resources affect regime change.

[1] Torben Iversen, "Democracy and Capitalism," in Donald Wittman and Barry Weingast, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 618.

[2] Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (1946; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[3] Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, "Why Did the West Extend the Franchise? Growth, Inequality and Democracy in Historical Perspective," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115, no. 4 (2000); idem, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ben Ansell and David Samuels, "Inequality and Democratization" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., April 3, 2008).

This article returns to one of the crucial historical cases that gave rise to the first generation of arguments that focused on land inequality: pre-1914 Prussia. It is a case with a democratization experience that cast such a long and dark shadow over the tumultuous twentieth century that the Allied Powers blamed it for all of Germany's mid-twentieth-century geopolitical troubles and simply eliminated it from the map of Europe after World War II.[4] As early as 1917, Max Weber, looking back on fifty years of Prussian history, argued that at the source of Germany's political problems was its largest state, Prussia, and its infamously nondemocratic "three class" voting system, which had left, in Weber's words, a "poisonous" influence on Germany, thwarting the development of the kind of democratic parliamentary institutions that had emerged elsewhere in Europe.[5]

The empirical aim of the article is to explain the puzzle of why Prussia's inegalitarian suffrage system endured throughout democracy's "first wave" despite the increased wealth associated with the rise of capitalism and repeated efforts at institutional reform. In addition to explaining an important historical case, the theoretical aim is to test a core point of convergence between what has been dubbed the "new structuralist" paradigm and an older Gerschenkronian thesis: that beyond the level of wealth in a society, the existence of an *unequal distribution of immobile assets* such as land is a major impediment to democratization.

While a long-standing social scientific literature has often considered Prussia's rise as paradigmatic of a nondemocratic pathway to modernity, this work has tended to operate with a broad macroscopic frame on the long sweep of history.[6] As compelling as that work is, the

---

[4] Christopher Clark, *The Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 670–81.

[5] Max Weber, "Das preussische Wahlrecht [1917]," in *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15 (Tübingen: J. C. B Mohr, 1984), 233. In pre-1914 Germany suffrage rules for state legislatures varied from state to state despite a precociously universal male, direct, and secret ballot for the national parliament. Prussia's three-class system stood out because Prussia was Germany's largest state and its suffrage system was one of the most regressive, combining universal male suffrage with a highly inegalitarian weighting of votes based on tax contributions that gave disproportionate influence to the wealthy (described more fully below). The system was remarkably robust, withstanding at least seventeen efforts at reform between its creation in 1849 and its demise in 1918, a time when suffrage was being democratically reformed in most other German states. For a European-wide view on suffrage reform in this period, see Markus Mattmüller, "Die Durchsetzung des allgemeinen Wahlrechts als gesamteuropaeischer Vorgang," in Beate Junker, Peter Gilg, and Richard Reich, eds., *Geschichte und Politische Wissenschaft* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1975).

[6] See, most notably, Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). For a discussion of how Moore's argument and mode of analysis has in turn shaped several generations of scholarship on democratization, including, for example, Gregory Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); see James Mahoney,

empirical strategy adopted here is different: I focus on a discrete episode of *potential* democratization that—had it been successful—would have had long-lasting consequences.[7] The article conducts a roll-call voting analysis of Prussia's parliament using an original data set to examine a decisive and revealing moment when history "failed to turn." In May 1912, just a few years before the outbreak of World War I, important legislation was introduced, debated, and voted upon in the Prussian state parliament that would have transformed Prussia's highly inegalitarian suffrage rules. In a close vote, legislators blocked this last prewar legislative effort at reform, leaving the three-class voting system to survive, unreformed until after the mass destruction of the First World War. In seeking to explain how individual legislators voted on the legislation, one can link macrofactors such as rural inequality to the individual decisions of politicians. In contrast to conventional cross-national studies of democratization that test their main claims with nationally aggregated data that are very distant from the decision making of real political leaders,[8] this design allows us to test existing theories of democratization with evidence drawn from the decision-making process of those involved "at the moment of transition."

Why did Prussia's nondemocratic regime persist? The evidence advanced in the article suggests support for two claims. On the one hand, a high concentration of land ownership *did* limit the prospects for democratization: representatives from electoral constituencies marked by high levels of landholding inequality were more likely to vote against democratic reforms. Indeed, the effect of landholding inequality was significant even after controlling for the level of income inequality. On the other hand, I also make the case that strictly structural arguments that focus solely on conflicts between the representatives of interests such as a monolithic landed elite and all other socioeconomic interests contain an important omission, namely, the role of the interelite dynamics of politics. I draw on a theoretical tradition associated with E. E. Schattschneider, who long ago observed, "It is impossible to explain the extension of the suffrage in terms that ignore the competition

---

"Knowledge Accumulation in Comparative Historical Analysis: The Case of Democracy and Authoritarianism," in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[7] This is in line with the research program proposed in Daniel Ziblatt, "How Did Europe Democratize?" *World Politics* 58 (January 2006), 332–34, 335–37.

[8] See, for example, Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limogni, "Modernization: Theory and Facts," *World Politics* 49 (January 1997); and Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization" *World Politics* 55 (July 2003).

of the parties."[9] Because decision makers are not only representatives of socioeconomic interests but are also political actors embedded in particular institutional contexts, their own electoral or power-seeking considerations shape whether they support suffrage reform. By identifying how *both* factors shaped the prospects of democratization in Prussia by affecting political parties' stance on democratization, the argument offers a new take in the long-standing debate between traditional structural approaches to democratization and those that emphasize the role of politics, institutions, and politicians' own strategic interests in electoral survival.[10]

The following discussion provides a summary of the theoretical framework that guides the analysis, presents the research design and data employed, and finally summarizes the findings, reflecting on the implications of the analysis for the study of democratization more generally.

THEORY: TWO LOGICS OF SUFFRAGE REFORM

Suffrage reform is the outgrowth of two different political conflicts. On the one hand, the structural roots of a regime *do* matter. Especially crucial for the kinds of regimes that were common in the first wave of democracy, as well as in many newly industrializing regimes today, is the level of landholding inequality. In such contexts fights over democratization were between the "ins" and "outs" of a political system, those who often corresponded to the representatives of large landholding interests and all other socioeconomic interests. On the other hand, accounts that focus exclusively on democratization as an indirect fight over redistribution between the representatives of immobile assets such as land and the representatives of other socioeconomic interests overlook a second component of the process of democratization: democratization is also a *political* process in which politicians occupy a preexisting institutional structure as they compete for political power. This fact introduces dynamics of electoral uncertainty into a political system leading decision makers to act in ways they otherwise would not. The process of democratization is thus the product of the intersection of these two distinct arenas.

---

[9] E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1942), 48.

[10] For paradigmatic examples of each approach, see Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

BREAD AND DEMOCRACY ELABORATED

First, we might ask: why focus on landholding inequality to begin with? A long pedigree of scholarship has demonstrated how preindustrial economic factors, such as patterns of landholding, exert a persistent influence on the politics of industrial societies.[11] For first-wave democratizers, the preindustrial distribution of wealth was a key determinant of regime outcomes, just as it is in many of today's newly democratizing states.[12] Tocqueville's exploration of the contributions of small landholders to democracy in the United States and Weber's critique of east Prussian Junkers in his diagnosis of Prussia's pre-1914 political ills were early accounts that have shaped the study of both of these regimes and of democracy more generally. Two waves of research on the effect of landholding inequality on democracy are identifiable. At the core of both are the important insights that higher levels of rural inequality generate traditional patterns of social control that are inimical to democracy and that higher levels of rural inequality prompt greater resistance from elites who face greater threats of expropriation and redistribution if democratization were to occur.

The first argument, associated in the post–World War II context of American social science with Alexander Gerschenkron[13] but elaborated more fully by Barrington Moore[14] usually employs a comparative historical methodology to link landholding inequality and political regime. The innovation of this framework is that it does not view urban conflict between industrial employers and workers as decisive; rather, it emphasizes how preindustrial holdovers shape contemporary democratization efforts. While the argument was in large part intended to explain the political dynamics of twentieth-century Central Europe, where landed elites wielded immense authority into the modern age, it contained a broader argument that has found resonance in diverse settings. In their study of Latin America and Europe, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens also emphasize the role of large landholders, arguing

[11] Moore (fn. 6); Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (fn. 10).

[12] See, for example, Jeffrey Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Marcus Kurtz, *Free Market Democracy and the Chilean and Mexican Countryside* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ashutosh Varshney, *Democracy, Development, and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jeffrey Riedinger, *Agrarian Reform in the Philippines: Democratic Transition and Redistributive Reform* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Erik Kuhonta, "The Political Foundations of Development: State and Party Formation in Malaysia and Thailand" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003).

[13] Gerschenkron (fn. 2).

[14] Moore (fn. 6).

that democracy proceeded unfettered where small- and medium-scale agriculture was dominant but that the democratization of states with large landed estates tended to be blocked.[15] Similar arguments have been made about how patterns of landholding and land reform shape democratization in both contemporary and historical cases, including twentieth-century Central America, Mexico, Chile, India, South Korea, and the Philippines, as well as historically in southern parts of the United States, southern Italy, and pre-Soviet Central Europe.[16]

More broadly, embedded in this "older" variant of structuralism is the claim that democratization is hampered for two reasons when it is introduced into settings marked by high levels of rural inequality. First, landholding inequality, unlike income inequality, is a proxy for a particularly pernicious and robust form of preindustrial traditional social power in which prestige, power, and wealth are correlated, giving rise to social norms (for example, invidious hierarchy) that undercut democratization. Second, landholding inequality also gives those atop such hierarchies the resources or means to operate unchecked and thus the capability to block democratization efforts. Overall, where informal authority relations are hierarchical and invidiously unequal (as in areas with high landholding inequality), this argument asserts, democracy finds the terrain less fertile.

In recent years, a second wave of research on inequality—especially rural inequality—has crept back into the comparative study of regimes, emphasizing an additional factor underpinning the negative relationship between landholding inequality and democratization. Political economists Acemoglu and Robinson[17] and Boix[18] do not emphasize the traditional *social control* dynamics entailed in high levels of rural inequality but argue instead that land inequality is relevant for regime outcomes because democratization is an indirect fight over *redistribution*, and land, as an immobile asset, triggers particularly strong resistance to democratization if unequally distributed. Inspired by the influential Meltzer-Richard model that has shaped political economists' conceptions of redistribution,[19] they ask: if the Meltzer-Richard model is at

[15] Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (fn. 10), 80, 83, 84, 91–92.

[16] See, e.g., Paige (fn. 12); Varshney (fn. 12); Kurtz (fn. 12); Jong-Sung You, "Explaining Corruption in South Korea, in Comparison with Taiwan and Philippines: The Role of Economic Inequality, Growth, and Democratization" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 1, 2005); Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid 19th Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[17] Acemoglu and Robinson (fn. 3, 2000, 2006).

[18] Boix (fn. 3)

[19] Allan Meltzer and Scott Richard, "A Rational Theory of the Size of Government," *Journal of Political Economy* 89, no. 5 (1981), 914–27.

all plausible, why would the rich and powerful ever grant the right to vote to the poor, as that would thereby reduce the income of the median voter and increase the possibility that the rich would be "soaked" by the poor? As Boix has noted, in areas with low levels of asset mobility (for example, where land, minerals, or oil are major portions of total wealth), this question becomes even more striking because the constraining effect of inequality on democracy is even *higher*. When holders of capital are heavily reliant on a highly specific asset, the threat of expropriation is higher, as is elite resistance to democracy.[20]

"New structural" theorists offer slightly different answers to the puzzle of democratization when focusing on land inequality. First, in their most comprehensive work, Acemoglu and Robinson[21] posit that the relationship between their aggregated concept of economic inequality and democratization resembles an inverted U-shaped curve: democratization is unlikely at both extremely high and extremely low levels of inequality but is most likely at moderate levels of inequality.

By contrast, Boix, who focuses on both income inequality and land inequality, comes to a different finding. Using cross-national data reported by Vanhanen,[22] Boix demonstrates that the percentage of total landholdings constituted by "family farms" (a proxy for rural inequality) shapes the likelihood of democratic transition: if a greater share of a nation's agricultural land is owned as *small* family farms, democratic transitions are *more* likely.

Finally, in their recent important empirical work, Ansell and Samuels highlight the differential effects of land inequality and income inequality and conclude that income inequality actually *increases* the chances of democratization, whereas, landholding inequality has a negative influence on democratization.[23] Thus, we find ourselves back at the core point: the nature of the preindustrial social order, including in particular the pattern of landholding within a society, shapes democratization. Whether because of the clashing social norms of democracy and hierarchy inherent in conditions of high landholding inequality, or the high levels of social control entailed with high landholding inequality, or the heightened distributional conflicts triggered by democratization in such settings, there is a convergence in the cross-national literature that higher landholding inequality undercuts the probability of democratic transition

---

[20] In Boix's phrase, "The absence of landlordism constitutes a necessary precondition for the triumph of democracy"; see Boix (fn. 3), 40.

[21] Acemoglu and Robinson (fn. 3, 2006).

[22] Tatu Vanhahen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[23] Ansell and Samuels (fn. 3), 4.

Although new structuralism and old structuralism provide powerful arguments, they share a distinctly *apolitical* presumption that politicians act as mere "channels" of social preferences. Politics, in this view, can be largely reduced to the distributional conflicts that often underpin them. If, by contrast, we focus instead on the level of individual decision makers and recognize that politicians, including those who reform suffrage rules, are participants in a political process that itself shapes their preferences, then the picture becomes slightly more complicated. In addition to analyzing socioeconomic motivations, we turn our attention to the question: what is it about the political process—and the institutional context in which politics occurs—that leads politicians to find it in their electoral interest to democratize?

Enter Politics: Interelite Competition and Suffrage Reform

In 1942 Schattschneider observed that in the American political setting, suffrage expansion was not a process whereby a unified elite granted voting rights in response to "demands from below." Instead, it was the product of elites competing with *each other*—they adjusted suffrage rules to expand the "scope of conflict" to incorporate what Schattschneider dubbed the "bystanders" of politics.[24] Schattschneider's insight highlights a useful point: rather than focusing only on conflict between a unitary elite and the disenfranchised, it is useful to consider how a political process marked by a competition for political power *within* an incumbent elite alters the preferences of elites. The insight that political actors act out of electoral self-interest in designing suffrage rules has been illustrated in a variety of case studies and comparative work. Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her work on the British Reform Act of 1867, argues that partisan competition between the Tories and the Whigs prompted Benjamin Disraeli's extension of the suffrage.[25] In her comparative study of third- and first-wave cases of democratization, Ruth Collier argues that "electoral support mobilization," in which elites grant suffrage for partisan gain, was one of the main paths to democracy. Finally, most recently economists Humberto Llavador and Robert J. Oxoby identify partisan incentives to explain the extension of suffrage.[26]

---

[24] Schattschneider (fn. 9), 45.

[25] Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867," *Journal of British Studies* 6 (November 1966).

[26] Ruth B. Collier, *Paths toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Humberto Llavador and Robert J. Oxoby, "Partisan Competition, Growth, and the Franchise," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120 (August 2005).

Despite the importance of these findings, less well understood is the possibility that the structural logic summarized above intersects with Schattschneider's political logic of explanation: how do the "policy-seeking" agents of the old and new structuralism occupy the same political universe as the "office-seeking" principals in Schattschneider's account? What happens when politicians are both simultaneously? If we conceptualize suffrage reform as a process in which politicians act on behalf of the economic interests they represent but are also politicians in pursuit of power whose preferences are shaped by the institutional configuration in which they operate, then we can achieve a much more comprehensive understanding of the politics of suffrage reform.

RESEARCH DESIGN, CASE, AND DATA

To demonstrate whether and how landholding patterns and electoral dynamics of incumbents shape moments of possible democratization, this analysis does not use a conventional cross-national comparative method. Instead, the article draws on rich but surprisingly under-utilized microlevel data from *within* the single case of Prussia that detail the structure and size of rural landholdings, levels of urbanization, and local patterns of electoral competition across the entire state of Prussia. An analysis of a crucial moment of potential transition exposes the fault lines underpinning nondemocratic regimes. Linking these structural and political data to how individual legislators voted on a crucial roll call vote on suffrage reform in the Prussian parliament involves two separate tasks. First, I test the basic empirical predictions of Schattschneider as well as the new and old structuralism. That is, I determine whether legislators were in fact more likely to vote against democratization if they came from districts with higher levels of landholding inequality and also expected to lose more electorally. Second, I identify possible *causal pathways* by which these variables shaped legislators' votes. I assess, for example, whether the determinants of the vote operated through the partisan affiliation of legislators or in an unmediated fashion independent of party politics.

In addition to exposing the political dynamics at play in moments of potential democratic reform, we can also engage a long-standing debate about the determinants of Germany's pre-1914 political regime.[27]

---

[27] The debate over the German "special path" (*Sonderweg*) is enormous. Some of the major works include Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1983); David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Margaret Anderson, *Practicing Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Sheri E. Berman "Modernization in Historical Perspective: The Case of Imperial

Despite a rich historical literature that has explored the multiple barriers and problems of pre-1914 German democratization, it has remained nearly an unquestioned tenet of the received *social scientific* conventional wisdom that Prussia's politically powerful Junkers and landed elite were the main culprits blocking nineteenth-century democratization in Prussia, and hence in Germany.[28] Indeed, there is surprisingly little systematic social scientific literature weighing the "powerful landed elite" hypothesis against other accounts, including, for example, the idea that a rapid industrialization triggered growing income inequality and increasing class conflict, thereby blocking democratization.[29] This gap is surprising given that one could reasonably make the argument that landed elites were of declining relevance by the early twentieth century, as industrialization outpaced agriculture as a major sector of the economy, thereby rendering traditional landowning classes less of a constraint on democratization.[30] One comparative scholar has gone so far as to assert, "Despite all the opprobrium directed at the *Junkers* in both the contemporary and subsequent academic literature, it remains to be demonstrated that they played a significant role in preventing the advent of parliamentary government in their country before 1918."[31]

Thus, this article focuses on Prussia as a crucial case that all too often has been merely an implicit comparative case or even a shadow case in many of our most widely held general claims about the role of landed wealth and political regimes.[32] But this analysis differs from

---

Germany" *World Politics* 53 (April 2001). For the most recent intervention, see Helmut Walser Smith, "When the *Sonderweg* Debate Left Us" *German Studies Review* 31 (May 2008).

[28] For a sample of the current and rich historical work on barriers, problems, and prospects of suffrage reform in German states after 1871, see Thomas Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht und Wahlkultur in Preussen, 1867–1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1994); Simone Laessig, *Wahlrechtskampf und Wahlreform in Sachsen, 1895–1909* (Weimar: Boehlau, 1998a); Simone Lässig "Wahlrechtsreformen in den deutschen Einzelstaaten," in Simone Lässig, Karl Heinrich Pohl, and James Retallack, eds., *Modernisierung und Region* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1998b); James Retallack, *The German Right, 1860–1920: Political Limits of Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); idem, "Wahlrechtskämpfe in Sachsen nach 1896," *Dresdner Hefte* 22, no. 4 (2004), 13–24.

[29] Two notable recent exceptions of social scientists explicitly placing agrarian structure against other hypotheses are Jörg Rössel, *Soziale Mobilisierung und Demokratie: Die preussischen Wahlrechtskonflikte 1900 bis 1918* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2000); and Michael Bernhard, "Democratization in Germany: A Reappraisal," *Comparative Politics* 33 (July 2001).

[30] This is one indirect implication of Berman's (fn. 27) important note of the declining *economic* significance of agriculture in Germany (p. 442). Additionally, recent important works have questioned the conventional conception of the Junkers' local social power. See Patrick Wagner, *Bauern, Junker, und Beamte* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005); and William Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[31] Thomas Ertman, "Liberalization and Democratization in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany in Comparative Perspective," in Carl Lankowski, ed., *Breakdown, Breakup, Breakthrough: Germany's Difficult Passage to Modernity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 47.

[32] See, for example, Moore (fn. 6). The methodological benefits of focusing on a "crucial case" (in this instance, a "most likely case") are elaborated most recently in John Gerring, *Case Study Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

many classical comparative historical single-outcome macro qualitative case studies of an earlier generation and instead uses a crucial single historical case to make within-case comparisons that test causal inferences with an increased number of microlevel observations.[33] By focusing on individual decision makers, the aim is to test explicitly whether the common thesis that a "powerful landed elite" was the major roadblock to democracy finds empirical support in the case for which the argument was originally developed. This section first presents the case from which the evidence is drawn and then presents the data used in the analysis.

THE CASE: PRUSSIA IN 1912

I test the theory elaborated above with an analysis of an important May 20, 1912, roll-call vote in Berlin's Prussian Chamber of Deputies that would have abolished the existing three-class voting system for Prussian parliamentary elections.[34] The electoral system, created in the wake of the 1848–49 revolutions by Prussian Interior Ministry officials (and modeled after a system already in place in Rhineland municipal elections), was intended to give the landed elite and the wealthy disproportionate influence in the post-1849 political system.[35] In brief, the system operated by preserving the suffrage for nearly all males over age twenty-four. But each voter in each electoral constituency was ranked by tax contribution and placed in one of three tax categories: the contributors to the top third of tax revenue in a district (averaging, in 1888, a mere 3.6 percent of voters) were in the first class, the second third of tax revenue contributors (averaging 10.8 percent of voters) were in the second class, and all remaining eligible males (averaging 85.6 percent of voters) were in the third class. In each district, the results of the election within each class determined the same number of electors, who in turn

---

[33] For a discussion of single-outcome studies, see Gerring (fn. 32). On within-case comparison, see Henry Brady and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); and Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005). On the strategy of using "new measures and new units" to increase the number of theoretically relevant observations, see Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 224–25.

[34] For front-page press coverage of the vote, see *Berliner Tageblatt*, May 21, 1912.

[35] The definitive work on the three-class voting system is Kühne (fn. 28). See also Rössel (fn 29). The older literature on the subject includes Reinhard Pateman, "Der Deutsche Episkopat und das Preussische Wahlrechsproblem, 1917/1918," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 13 (October 1965); Ludwig Bergsträsser, *Die Preussische Wahlrechtsfrage im Kriege und die Entstehung der Osterbotschaft 1917* (Tübingen: Verlag von Mohr, 1929); Hans Dietzel, "Die Preussischen Wahlrechtsreformbestrebungen von der Oktroyierung des Dreiklassenwahlrechts bis zum Beginn des Weltkrieges" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cologne, 1934); Günther Grünthal, "Das Preussische Dreiklassenwahlrecht: Ein Beitrag zur Genesis und Funktion des Wahlrechtsoktrois von May 1849," *Historische Zeitschrift* 226 (1978).

selected winning candidates.[36] In this intentionally income-malapportioned system individual wealthy voters (those in the first two classes) wielded disproportionate electoral power. Along with a conservative-dominated upper chamber, the three-class voting system was designed, in the words of Prussian cabinet officials as they debated various institutional choices in 1849, to "generate Conservative votes."[37]

The system was effective. One American observer described it in 1911 as the "the citadel of the powers" of autocracy and bureaucracy in Prussia. This early American political scientist continued, "Its abandonment would give the enemy possession of the entire fortress."[38] Indeed, the system generated vocal critics. Between 1849 and 1912, seventeen separate pieces of legislation were introduced into the Chamber of Deputies to reform or abolish the system, ranging from proposals from the Center Party in the 1870s to proposals from Social Democrats and Left Liberals in the 1880s and 1890s.[39] While the other direct Prussian parliamentary votes on suffrage reform have left no record of who voted how, the only other roll-call votes on related issues (for example, in 1873) were procedural, calling, for example, for postponing discussion to another day. The 1912 vote is thus crucial and has the added benefit of occurring precisely when similar suffrage reforms were successfully sweeping across other German states, including Bavaria, and Württemberg, making the persistence of Prussian nondemocracy into the World War I era anomalous, even in the German setting.

Thus our attention focuses on the last pre–world war episode of reform that also had a reasonable likelihood of success: that of May 20, 1912.[40] It was proposed, debated, and narrowly defeated by only thirty votes. It was voted on in a heated political context, immediately following the January 1912 *national* parliamentary elections that today are

[36] For a more detailed account of voting practice, see Kühne (fn. 28), 129–32.

[37] Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussische Kulturbesitz, I HA Rep90 Staatsministerium St. M 9317, Berlin, May 7, 1849.

[38] Walter J. Shepard, "Tendencies to Ministerial Responsibility in Germany," *American Political Science Review* 5 (February 1911), 66.

[39] It should be noted that any effort to reform the three-class voting system would also have had to win approval of the Prussian upper chamber and the king. Though high hurdles to pass, the king's cabinet had itself proposed reform legislation earlier in the decade, suggesting the willingness to endorse some modernization of the electoral system. See Kühne (fn. 28).

[40] For discussion of the vote, see Rössel (fn. 29), 158, 284–85; and Dieter Schuster, "Das Preussische Dreiklassenwahlrecht, der politische Streik und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie bis zum Jahr 1914" (Ph.D. diss., Universität Bonn, 1958), 270. It is worth noting that post–World War I roll-call votes also occurred (May 1918). See the analysis in Jörg Rössel "Eliteninteressen und soziale Konfliktlinien in Demokratisierungsprozessen: Die soziale Konstruktion von Interessen und das Abstimmungsverhalten von Abgeordneten bei der Reform des Dreiklassenwahlrechts in Preussen 1918," *Historische Sozialforschung* 25 (2000).

often regarded as a turning point in prewar German history.[41] In the national parliamentary elections of that year, the Social Democratic Party reached a new prewar high in its electoral success, gaining 34.8 percent of the vote and 110 seats in the 397-seat parliament to become the largest party in the German parliament. Political leaders on the right of the political spectrum felt increasingly besieged and isolated.[42] Precisely this squeeze, according to one prominent but controversial view, led to the radicalization of the right on foreign policy questions.[43]

Whether or not internal tensions prompted the push to war, what is clear is that the Social Democrats' impressive performance in national elections, alongside its continued poor showing in Prussian state elections (and the inverse situation for parties of the right), highlighted an increasingly obvious disjuncture between national and state electoral systems. The Prussian three-class electoral system was arguably the most important remaining safeguard against deeper changes that seemed to be afoot. But in stark contrast to other nation-states in Europe that underwent suffrage reform during the same period, the proponents and opponents of suffrage reform in Prussia were not operating behind a Rawlsian "veil of ignorance" where suffrage reform would entail high levels of uncertainty. Indeed, in contrast to Britain, Belgium, and other European cases, the electoral effects of suffrage reform in Prussia were quite *certain*: Germany's multilevel electoral system meant that the immediate electoral outcome of full-blown universal male suffrage were already visible to Prussian elites. Since the underlying territory of national and state electoral districts mapped nearly perfectly onto each other, political elites were able to compare electoral results of state and national elections, elected with different suffrage rules, and draw conclusions about Prussia.[44] As a result, the pivotal election of January 1912 had two simultaneous effects: it suggested that deeper forces of change were at work and it also provided unusually precise levels of information about the likely electoral effects of these changes were suffrage reform in Prussia to be achieved. The result was that the stakes were raised for the last prewar effort to reform Prussia's suffrage.

[41] For an analysis of this election, see Jürgen Bertram, *Die Wahlen zu Deutschen Reichstag vom Jahre 1912* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1964).

[42] See, e.g., Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 316–30.

[43] For a sense of the evolution of this debate, see, briefly, Eckart Kehr, *Battle Ship Building and Party Politics in Germany, 1894–1901* (1930; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975); Eley (fn. 42); Niall Ferguson, "Public Finance and National Security: The Domestic Origins of the First World War Revisited." *Past and Present* 142 (February 1994).

[44] For historical evidence that state politicians compared the results in their own elections with the results in their districts in federal elections when considering suffrage reform, see Lässig (fn. 28, 1998a).

MEASURING THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE:
   SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIZATION

Thus, the May 1912 roll-call vote on the reform of the Prussian three-class voting system emerges as an opportunity to examine the political fault lines underpinning the Prussian political regime. A first step in using the Prussian case to investigate the role of landholding inequality in blocking democratization is to reconstruct how members of the Prussian parliament actually voted on the 1912 legislation. Based on Reichstag parliamentary minutes, Table 1 summarizes how parliamentarians voted on the reform.[45]

As is clear from the table, there were three broad types of votes possible for each legislator (yes, no, and abstention). At one level, it is clear that the decision to vote outright for or against the reform was clearly a party-line vote—an issue I discuss in detail in the analysis below. But the strict party-line vote leaves two questions unanswered. First, why did different parties take the particular stances on the vote that they did? And additionally, how do we explain the representatives who did not vote with their party? While party line is a decisive proximate predictor of the vote, these two questions suggest the need for a deeper analysis.

In the 1912 vote, in addition to the party-line vote, abstentions were important because they were utilized strategically and thus were decisive, as is often the case in roll-call votes. We are able to draw one important distinction among the abstainers. According to the voting records, among the ninety-one abstainers, there were forty-four whose absences from the vote were officially "excused."[46] Also, more interestingly, as the vote was called, and precisely at the moment the rest of their parties voted for the reform, thirteen National Liberals, one Polish Party representative, and thirty-three Center legislators left the parliamentary chamber. These representatives' absences were marked down for the official record as "unexcused" (*Ohne Entschuldigung gefehlt*).[47] Most crucially, the dramatic exit of these forty-seven representatives from the Chamber while their remaining party colleagues voted *for* the reform was decisive because the proposal was defeated by only thirty votes.

---

[45] Verhandlungen, Haus der Abgeordneten, 77 Sitzung, May 20, 1912, 6428–32.

[46] The voting record lists these forty-four representatives as "excused," "sick," or "on vacation"; Verhandlungen (fn. 45), 6432.

[47] See Schuster (fn. 40). Schuster reports that fifteen National Liberals left the chambers, but according to the roll-call results there were thirteen National Liberals and thirty-three Center Party representatives who had "unexcused" absences; Verhandlungen (fn. 45), 6432.

TABLE 1
PRUSSIA'S 1912 LEGISLATION ON REFORMING THE SUFFRAGE[a]

Party	Total Reps	Yes	No	Abstain
Conservative (K)	152	0	139	13 (0)
National Lib (N)	65	45	0	20 (13)
Center (Z)	102	58	0	44 (33)
Reichspartei (R)	59	0	49	10 (0)
Left Liberals (F)	36	33	0	3 (0)
Polish Party (P)	15	14	0	1 (1)
Social Dem (S)	6	6	0	0 (0)
Danes (D)	2	2	0	0 (0)
All	437	158	188	91 (47)

[a] Data for this are drawn from the minutes of the Prussian parliament. See *Verhandlungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten* 77. Sitzung, 21. Legislative Period, May 20, 1912, 6428–6432. In the abstentions column, the figures in parentheses refer to the number of delegates who "abstained without excuse." A discussion of this follows in the text.

In the analysis that follows I utilize roll-call votes as they appear in the pages of the May 20, 1912, minutes of the Prussian state legislature to construct *two* different dependent variables that measure support for the democratization bill. The first measure is an ordinal scale, coding a no vote as 0, an abstention as 1, and a yes vote as 2. In two models I include all abstentions, excused and unexcused. In two additional models I use the same ordinal scale but drop excused absences from the analysis to focus on the crucial unexcused absences. In a second measure of support for democratization, I code votes dichotomously (as yes or no), with abstentions coded as opposite the party line. Finally, I also code a separate, dichotomous dependent variable measuring whether a party's party line on the legislation was to vote yes (coded 1) or no (coded 0). This latter variable is used to assess the nature of the causal mechanisms at work and to untangle the *sources* of each party's party line.[48]

MEASURING THE EXPLANATORY VARIABLE:
    RURAL INEQUALITY

The first analytical aim of this article is to link landholding inequality and the traditional patterns of social power that it entails to the vote on democratization, focusing on both the average size of farms and the distribution of agricultural landholdings by size for each electoral

[48] In an additional analysis below, I model the "partisan affiliation" of individual legislators as a way of evaluating the causal mechanisms at work in the other models. The data for this outcome draw on a biographical handbook of Prussian legislators. See Thomas Kühne *Handbuch der Wahlen zum Preussischen Abgeordnetenhaus*, 1867–1918 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1994).

constituency. Since I am interested in linking attributes of electoral constituencies to vote on suffrage reform, the key descriptive questions are as follows. Was an electoral constituency marked by highly concentrated and inequitable distribution of landholdings, where a few estate owners held most of the land? Or was an equal distribution of smaller landholdings predominant? Other scholars have tried to measure landholding inequality, usually in a cross-national context, providing revealing but aggregated figures of, for example, "family farms as percentage of total number of farms" or a single Gini coeffcient of land concentration for an entire country.[49] Because my focus is on subnational differences within a single country, the analysis begins by trying to reconstruct the actual number and size of landholdings at the most microlevel possible. Moreover, rather than only recording the "average" size of farms in different large regions that may also conceal inequalities, as past scholars have done (for example, Gerschenkron), we can additionally estimate the distribution of agricultural units (that is, how similarly or unevenly sized are agricultural units).

One remarkable yet untapped empirical resource presents itself from Germany's national census. In 1898 the Imperial Statistical Office (*das Kaiserliche Statistische Amt*) released the census results of German agriculture, based on surveys of over five million farms that were collected at what might be called the "county" level for 1,004 small county units (*Kreisen*) in Germany.[50] Of these units, just under 550 were located in Prussia. For each district, the census reports the number of farms as well as the size of each farm in that district. In Prussia, the average number of farms in these units was 5,996, and 58 percent of farm units were smaller than two hectares. Unsurprisingly, Germany in the 1890s was marked by a high degree of regional variation in both the size and the number of agricultural units. For example, while more than half of all farms were smaller than two hectares, in an eastern Prussian district such as Fischhausen, the median farm size was between sixty and seventy hectares. Overall, what scholars such as Gerschenkron[51] argue tends to be true: the districts with the greatest concentration of landholding are found in the eastern parts of Prussia.

[49] Bruce M. Russett, "Inequality and Instability: The Relation of Land Tenure to Politics," *World Politics* 16 (April 1964); Edward Muller and Mitchell Seligson, "Inequality and Insurgency" *American Political Science Review* 81 (June 1987); Boix (fn. 3).

[50] Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt. 1898. *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, vol. 112 (Berlin: Verlag des Königlich Preussichen Statistischen Bureaus, 1898), 351–413, table 9. The five million farms identified for the survey included all officially designated "landwirtschaftliche Betriebe," 40 percent of which were operated by their owners and the remainder of which were rented or communal land or took some other form. For a discussion of what qualified as an agricultural unit for the survey, see discussion, pp. 8–9. For a discussion of the type of ownership structure of units involved in the study, see pp. 15–19.

[51] Gerschenkron (fn. 2).

Despite the richness of the economic material contained in this census report, the *political* significance of this well-known variation has until now been difficult for scholars to assess because the 276 electoral constituencies from which Prussia's 437 representatives (as of 1912) were elected do not correspond with the approximately 550 counties for which Prussia's Statistical Office collected its census data. However, this gap in the scholarship can be overcome. The data from the Prussian statistical office are for counties that are *smaller* than the electoral constituency units, and it is thus possible to aggregate these smaller units to the electoral constituency level to give us a sense for the first time of the size, number, and concentration of agricultural holdings for each of Prussia's 276 electoral constituencies.[52] After identifying which counties fell in which electoral constituencies, I calculated the concentration of landholding in Prussia's electoral constituencies using a Gini coefficient. In this instance, the Gini coefficient, which reflects the magnitude of the deviation from any perfectly equal distribution, tells us the degree to which all agricultural land in an electoral constituency is equally distributed.

How do the data look? As Figure 1 also demonstrates, the level of inequality varies widely in Prussia. Of the 276 constituencies in 1912, the average Gini coefficient score in 1895 was 0.77. The inequality ranged from a coefficient of 0.49 to 0.94. That is, land was concentrated in the hands of the landowners nearly twice as much in an electoral constituency such as the moderately rural Greifswald district (0.94 Gini score) as in the moderately rural Oberwesterwaldkreis-Dillkreis in Hessen-Nasau (0.49 Gini score). In addition, the interquartile range for Gini scores for the 276 constituencies is 0.14. That range indicates that those constituencies with landholding inequality in the 75th percentile had a Gini coefficient nearly 20 percent higher than a district at the 25th percentile. How big a spread is this? In fact, today, according to contemporary United Nations statistics, a similar difference in income (not

---

[52] A key source in aggregating county units was Kühne (fn. 48), which lists which towns and counties were in which electoral district. Using 1895 census data on the size and number of farms at the county level, I aggregated these data to correspond with the 276 Prussian electoral districts. This involved identifying the administrative units of each electoral district and adding the corresponding values for both number and area of farms to obtain data for the larger electoral district. For each constituency, I calculated a Gini coefficient to measure landholding inequality. To ensure accuracy, it was necessary to record changes in district areas after 1895. Major changes such as those resulting from the redistricting reform of 1906 could mostly be incorporated in the aggregation of data. It was only in Berlin, Teltow-Beeskow-Storkow-Charlottenburg, and Tarnowitz-Beuthen-Zabrze-Kattowitz that administrative units were not precise enough to completely allow for that. In these cases, I approximated Gini coefficients by using the same county data for all newly created electoral districts. Other territorial changes were minor, concerning twenty-five exchanges of two or three municipalities or estates between two districts, and were ignored in the analysis.
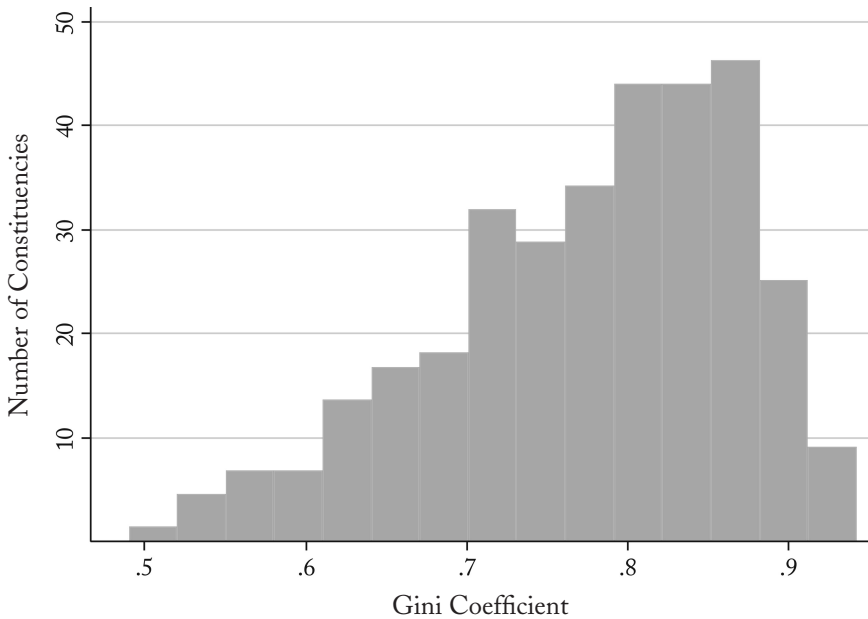
FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF LANDHOLDING INEQUALITY AMONG PRUSSIA'S ELECTORAL
CONSTITUENCIES, 1895

landholding) separates countries like Norway and France from Cambodia and Nicaragua.[53] It is thus striking that this wide diversity existed within the middle 50 percent of landholdings inside the single state of Prussia in the 1890s.

It should be noted, however, that because I am interested in all electoral constituencies, these data include Gini coefficient scores on landholding in both rural *and* urban constituencies. As I discuss below, I also include a measure for *income inequality* in the analysis, in order to address any concern that landholding inequality might not be relevant in urban settings. Yet the contention in the article is that above and beyond income inequality, a measure of landholding inequality captures important variations that have enduring effects. For example, even the most urbanized districts of Berlin, Essen, and Breslau contained some agricultural land. Moreover, in the 1890s only thirty-nine of the constituencies had less than 10 percent employed in the agricultural sector.

[53] United Nations, *United Nations Human Development Report 2006* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2006)

Additionally, substantial differences existed even among the extremely rural (over 60 percent employed in agriculture) electoral constituencies. For example, in Heiligenbeil-Preuss Eylau, a perhaps prototypical highly rural Eastern Prussian electoral constituency along the Baltic Sea, 64 percent of the population was employed in the agricultural sector, and its Gini score of 0.92 put it above average in the concentration of landholding. By contrast, Diepholz Syke, an equally rural constituency south of Bremen, was prototypical of many highly rural constituencies in central and western Prussia, with 61 percent of its population employed in agriculture sector but with a lower Gini score (0.60), indicating an economy dominated by relatively more equitable distribution of land.

In short, we see that even within Prussia there was a pattern of variation in the size of landholdings, that largely confirms the conventional wisdom. However, with the benefit, for the very first time, of detailed data on the structure of landholding in electoral constituencies across all of Prussia, it is possible to examine more systematically the longstanding position that landholding patterns fundamentally shaped politics in ways that blocked Prussian democratization.

THE ROLE OF POLITICS: PARTY COMPETITION AS
    EXPLANATORY VARIABLE

Motivated by Schattschneider's insight, we also expect electoral motivations of to have been decisive in shaping how legislators voted on democratization. Thus I also include a variable that measures the "electoral incentive" facing individual members of parliament. Because the 1912 legislation dealt with suffrage rules, we might imagine that legislators' positions on the question were determined not only by structural attributes of the constituency they represent but also by how the leadership of parties and the legislators themselves thought their electoral performance would be affected by an institutional change.

Indeed, we might expect that a legislator whose party performed relatively better under the status quo system and was expected to suffer under the proposed new electoral system would be more likely to oppose reform. But how do we assess whether Prussian parties perceived the rule change as being in their electoral interest or not? Fortunately, Imperial Germany's multilevel electoral system offers an unusual source of data on this question. The proposed rule change for Prussia would institute a system that would more closely approximately the universal direct, equal, and secret ballot *already* in place in national Reichstag elections. Thus, as political actors themselves did at the time, we can compare the results of national elections held under the alternative elec-

toral rule with the results of elections held under the status quo voting rules in Prussia to assess whether and to what degree individual legislators had an electoral incentive to support the 1912 legislation.

After matching up electoral results from the most recent Prussian state elections (1908) with the most recent Reichstag elections (early 1912), it is possible to construct an "electoral incentive" variable for nearly every member of the Prussian state parliament. This variable is built in two steps. First, how much better or worse off would an individual legislator be if the national electoral system were adopted for state elections?[54] Second, how important would such a rule change be in determining the outcome of the election?[55] While the latter "how much it matters" variable should not have an independent effect, the interaction of that variable and the former might be significant in determining how an individual legislator might vote.[56]

ADDITIONAL CONTROLS

I also include three main additional variables that measure different structural features of a member of parliament's home constituency. First I include a measure of income inequality from 1912. This measure, using census and tax data on individual and household income at the constituency level, was meticulously put together by economic historian Oliver Grant.[57] His data use the standard measure of the ratio of upper 10th percentile/lower 40th percentile in each constituency, giving us for the first time constituency-level income inequality figures, though the data cover only two-thirds of the units in the analysis. This control variable helps disentangle the distinctive effect landholding inequality might have, apart from income inequality. Additionally, I include the following two variables: (1) a variable to assess the level of socioeconomic development immediately preceding the vote, measured by percentage of the population employed in the agricultural sector for

[54] This variable measures the "base level of support" for a legislator's party under the two systems and is measured by contrasting the percentage of vote received in a district in the state election for a legislator's party with the percentage of vote received in the same district in the first round of the federal elections for that same party. Data source: for federal elections, see ICPSR, *German Reichstag Election Data* [Computer File] (Ann Arbor: ICPSR, 1991); Kühne (fn. 48) for state elections.

[55] Since we are interested here in the extent to which the rule change would change the outcome of an election (crossing 50 percent of the vote), this is measured by taking the absolute value of (50-local vote share won) and multiplying it by -1. If a party is at 50 percent, this number will be 0. If a party is at 10 percent or 90 percent in the Prussian election, this number will be -40. The closer a party gets to 0, the closer the election, and thus the more important the rule change.

[56] The product of "base level of support" and "how important" an election is gives us the interaction of these two terms.

[57] See Oliver Grant, *Migration and Inequality in Germany, 1870–1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Data set provided to me by Oliver Grant.

each constituency,[58] and (2) a variable to capture religious makeup of each constituency, measured by the percentage of the total population of each constituency that was Catholic in the same year.[59]

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In order to assess the predictions that the threat of electoral loss and high landholding inequality trigger resistance to democratization, I first estimate four ordered probit models with a single dependent variable that ranks each parliamentary member in terms of his support for the 1912 bill.[60] A vote for democratic reform is coded 2, an abstention is coded 1, and a vote against the bill is coded 0. To test if the results are robust to the inclusion of abstentions, I also estimate four probit models where a vote for democratic reform is coded 1, a vote against the bill is coded 0, and abstentions are coded as the opposite of the party line.[61] This test for robustness is important because abstentions could be interpreted as opposition to the party line as well as indifference to the outcome of the legislation. In the results below, I report the estimation of the four ordered probit models. The first two models include all abstentions; the second two models include all yes and no votes and only the unexcused abstentions, which capture those who were in the chamber but walked out as the vote was called.

I hypothesize that each of the variables I list above—landholding inequality, Catholic concentrations, urbanization, and legislators' electoral incentive—is significantly correlated with legislators' stances vis-à-vis the 1912 legislation. I also include a control for income inequality in two of the models.[62] One account has argued that inequality, broadly defined, has a curvilinear relationship with democratization.[63] Also a

[58] Kühne (fn. 48).

[59] Ibid.

[60] According to my theory, party affiliation and constituency characteristics are not competing explanations for the 1912 vote. Instead party affiliation was a vehicle for constituency characteristics (and their associated political preferences), and therefore it was not included as a *separate* explanatory variable in the first set of models. I later provide empirical support for the assertion that characteristics like inequality and economic modernization are, in large measure, *determinants* of party affiliation. Other scholars have demonstrated that constituency characteristics operate both directly on legislators and indirectly through party. See Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, "Parties and Interests in the 'Marriage of Iron and Rye,'" *British Journal of Political Science* 28 (1998).

[61] For example, a Center Party abstention is coded 0, a vote against democratization, since the rest of the party voted for the bill.

[62] Because income inequality data are available for only approximately two-thirds of the cases, I exclude it from two of the models. The chief variables of interest, landholding inequality and electoral incentive, are unaffected by its exclusion.

[63] Acemoglu and Robinson (fn. 3, 2006). In analysis not reported here, I also included squared and cubed terms of "income inequality," which did not affect the statistical significance of the landholding inequality variables.

scatter plot of the data suggests that the relationship between landholding inequality and vote for democratization is indeed nonlinear. Thus I also include a quadratic and cubed landholding inequality variable to take account of this expectation.[64] I present the results of the ordered probit models in Table 2. The statistical significance of each coefficient is robust to the method of incorporating the abstentions, tested using a probit model.

As we see from the results above, all variables of interest except income inequality are significant. The landholding inequality coefficient is so large that, for example, in the best-fit model (model 3) moving from the minimum to maximum Gini coefficient—holding all other variables at their mean values—increases the chance of abstaining or otherwise opposing the 1912 bill from 10 percent to 96 percent.[65] What does the significance of all *three* landholding inequality terms—first-order, quadratic, and cubic—tell us substantively? Across the whole range, the relationship between landholding inequality and support for democracy is negative. But the effect is not linear. If we simulate changes in landholding inequality while all the other variables are kept at their mean, we can see how the predicted probability of supporting democracy changes.

As Figure 2 shows, when landholding inequality is low, marginal increases in inequality significantly lower the likelihood that a representative votes for democracy. For example, holding all other variables at their mean, moving from the minimum level of landholding inequality (0.49) to just beyond the 10th percentile (0.65) of inequality decreases the chance of a representative voting for democratic reforms from 91 percent to 34 percent. By contrast, as Figure 2 also shows, at moderate levels of landholding inequality, marginal increases in inequality have little effect on the chances that a representative votes for democracy. For example, a shift from 0.65 to 0.85 (which captures the middle 60 percent of districts) only changes the odds of getting an abstention, yes, or no vote by less than 5 percent.[66] Yet in highly unequal districts, marginal

[64] Landholding inequality has a negative but insignificant effect when the model includes either (1) only a first-order inequality term or (2) first- and second-order inequality terms.

[65] P(0 or 1) when inequality is at its minimum is 0.04. P(0 or 1) when inequality is at its maximum is 0.90). P(2) drops from 0.96 to 0.10 over the same range of inequality. Probabilities are calculated by adjusting inequality—along with its squared and cubed terms—and holding all other variables at their mean values. Probabilities and probability changes presented in this paper can be calculated in Stata 9 using the prchange and prvalue commands available as part of the SPost package created for Stata 9 by Jeremy Freese and J. Scott Long. The simulations all use model 3.

[66] P(0) decreases from 0.57 to 0.53. P(1) increases from 0.17 to 0.18. P(2) increases from 0.25 to 0.29.

TABLE 2
ORDERED PROBIT MODEL FOR PARLIAMENTARY VOTE ON PRUSSIAN
DEMOCRATIZATION BILL, 1912[a]

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Support for Democratization abstentions	DV Including all abstentions	DV Including all excused	DV Excluding excused abstentions	DV Excluding excused abstentions
Land Inequality	−244.1***	−306.6***	−216.7**	−265.45**
	(90.6)	(106.1)	(102.0)	(115.4)
Land Inequality quadratic	327.2***	420.2***	289.2**	361.36**
	(126.2)	(148.0)	(142.9)	(161.6)
Land Inequality cubed	−145.0**	−190.5***	−127.7*	−162.98**
	(57.9)	(68.0)	(65.6)	(74.33)
% Catholics	0.013***	0.014***	0.015***	0.016***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Urbanization	0.039***	0.035***	0.050***	0.045***
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Electoral Incentive (EI)	0.011***	0.010***	0.015***	0.014***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Income Inequality		0.360		0.434
		(0.347)		(0.477)
(Pseudo) R^2	0.25	0.22	0.33	0.31
N	264	220	239	200

* p-value < 0.1 ** p-value < 0.05, *** p-value < 0.01; robust standard errors in parentheses

[a] The analysis is limited here to a subset of the cases (N=264 and N=239) for which I could match state-level and national constituencies (to calculate the "electoral incentive" variable) as well as data for which income inequality are available (N=220 and N=200). Because the remaining units cannot be matched, they are dropped from the regression models reported above. The different sample sizes across the four models reflect the different number of cases for which "matching" of cases was possible. A robustness test reveals that all the other variables are still significant and have coefficients pointing in the same direction when the remaining cases are included in the analysis.

increases in landholding inequality again lead to sharp reductions in the chance of voting for democracy. Moving from 0.85 to the maximum Gini coefficient increases the chance a representative opposes the democratization bill from 46 percent to 78 percent.

This negative nonlinear relationship does not fit perfectly with the predictions of Boix; nor does it fit perfectly with those of Acemoglu and Robinson.[67] At extreme values of the Gini coefficient in terms of landholding, small changes in inequality matter quite a bit; over the large middle range of the sample, however, differences in landholding

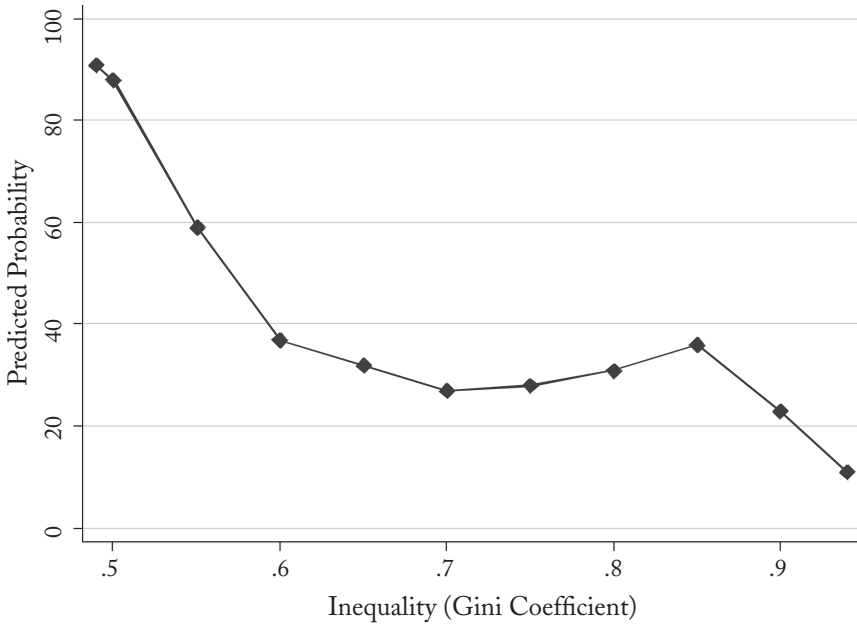[67] Boix (fn. 3); Acemoglu and Robinson (fn. 3, 2000, 2006)

FIGURE 2
PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF VOTING "YES" ON DEMOCRATIZATION

inequality do little to explain divergent outcomes in support of democratization. Moreover, we see that while inequality might be important at extremely high levels and extremely low levels of landholding inequality, at moderate levels, the other variables of religion, party competition, and degree of urbanization might have an important independent impact.

As Table 2 makes clear, however, this discussion does not mean that Gini perfectly predicts the vote. Holding a constituency's Gini at its mean, shifts in the other variables also have a significant effect on the probability that a representative votes a particular way on the bill. For example, in two districts with the same level of Catholicism, the same urban-rural demographics, and the same level of inequality, a representative expecting not to be electorally harmed as a result of the bill (for example, a shift from the minimum electoral incentive to the maximum electoral incentive in the sample) would have an increased likelihood of voting for the legislation, from 8 percent to 54 percent. [68]

[68] Since the variable measuring "how important" and its interaction with "electoral incentive" were not significant in any specification, I dropped them from the analysis and do not report the findings here.

Similarly, holding all other variables at their mean values, an increase from the minimum to the maximum in level of urbanization increases the chances of getting support for the bill from 2 percent to 89 percent. Even religion had a significant impact, with a shift from the minimum to maximum proportion of Catholics in the population increasing the probability of getting a yes vote from 15 percent to 69 percent.[69] Thus, while landholding inequality and other structural characteristics were enormously influential as determining factors, they alone do not explain the full range of variation in the dependent variable. Rather, electoral incentives of political actors themselves also played an important role in determining the outcome of the vote.

But still unanswered is the question: what was the precise *causal pathway* through which these variables shaped legislators' votes in 1912? At first glance, two possibilities suggest themselves. On the one hand, the effect of these variables may have been *direct*, influencing legislators' preferences toward institutional reform, independent of any partisan affiliation.[70] On the other hand, since party affiliation appears to have played such a major role in the vote of nonabstainers, it is more likely the variables of landholding inequality and electoral incentive exerted an *indirect* influence on the vote, through a two-step mechanism in which, first, constituency attributes determined which parties were elected, and, second, each party set its party line in accord with the interests of the districts it represented as well as its own electoral considerations.

Indeed, analyses of nineteenth-century German Reichstag legislative voting by Schonhardt-Bailey[71] have demonstrated that "constituency characteristics" affect legislators' roll-call votes not only via their influence on legislator's own preferences but also via the partisan affiliation of representatives and the resulting party line of each party. Additionally, a broader secondary literature on nineteenth-century German political parties also makes clear that most important legislative votes in nineteenth-century Germany occurred after the powerful party legislative groups (*Fraktion*) set their official party position in internal prevote negotiations.[72]

---

[69] Again, probabilities and probability changes were calculated in Stata 9 using the prchange and prvalue commands available as part of the SPost package created for Stata 9 by Jeremy Freese and J. Scott Long.

[70] That forty-seven representatives departed from the party line to abstain from the vote, determining the outcome, indicate that party line cannot explain the full variation in the dependent variable. However, the relatively small number of defectors make it difficult to assess through a regression analysis whether the decision to abstain was a result of underlying constituent characteristics, electoral incentives, or other factors.

[71] Schonhardt-Bailey (fn. 60).

[72] For example, in the National Liberal Party, if two-thirds of the members agreed on a common party position in prevote meetings, then this was considered a "priority" item for the party (*Parteisache*),

However, does the evidence support the contention that constituency attributes significantly affect which parties were elected in the first place as well as each party's party line in the key moment of political decision? Using the eight political parties in the Prussian legislature as dependent variables in a multinomial logit analysis, we can utilize the main socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of each constituency (the level of landholding concentration, percentage of Catholics, and percentage of the population employed in the nonagricultural sector) as independent variables to predict partisan affiliation of legislators. If an indirect effect truly exists—that is, if constituency characteristics correlate with roll-call votes *specifically as a result of the partisan affiliation* of legislators—then these constituency characteristics should also determine which parties won in which constituencies.

Multinomial logit analysis yields estimates of the probability of the victory of each party by generating regression coefficients for each independent variable. We see in Table 3 that most of the independent variables are significant predictors for each party, when the Conservative Party (the largest party) is set as the baseline.[73]

More importantly, we can also analyze the substantive importance of these variables by simulating changes in the independent variables to estimate the probability that any individual party would be elected in particular electoral constituencies, given changes in these attributes. Since landholding inequality is the chief variable of interest, I simulate changes, as I did in the analysis above, but this time to identify its effect on the likelihood that a *particular political party* would be elected in a district in the first place. Holding the other two constituency characteristics variables at their mean, we see, as Figure 3 demonstrates, the direction of the effect of landholding inequality varies, as we would expect, from party to party, but the effect, especially for the big parties, appears to be quite substantial.

For example, holding the other variables at their mean, moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile of landholding inequality more than doubles the probability that a Conservative Party representative

demanding unanimous party loyalty and abstentions from those who insisted on defecting from the party line; Thomas Nipperdey, *Die Organisation der deutschen Parteien vor 1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961), 160. Similarly, in the Center Party, prevote internal negotiations regularly occurred in which the party leadership established consensus among its parliamentary representatives, usually requiring defectors to stay away from the vote rather than vote against the party line (p. 289). See also Ursula Mittmann, *Fraktion und Partei: ein Vergleich von Zentrum und Sozialdemokratie im Kaissereich* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976).

[73] Though Social Democrats and the Danish Party were included in the analysis, Table 2 does not report the coefficients for these two parties that had less than seven representatives.

TABLE 3
MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL FOR FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ELECTED
PARTY IN PRUSSIAN LEGISLATURE, 1908–12[a]

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	DV Reichspartei	DV National Liberals	DV Left Liberals	DV Center Party	DV Polish Party
Land Inequality	−3.392*	−9.55***	9.392**	−11.57***	6.335
	(1.90)	(2.154)	(4.780)	(3.789)	(5.959)
% Catholics	0.006	0.023**	0.031**	0.174***	0.242***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.023)	(0.042)
Urbanization	0.034***	0.087***	0.095***	0.123***	0.023
	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.041)
Constant	2.987*	9.027***	−6.994*	3.14	−25.55***
	(1.629)	(1.855)	(4.186)	(3.05)	(8.47)
N= 437					

* p-value < 0.1 ** p-value < 0.05, *** p-value < 0.01; robust standard errors in parentheses; pseudo R^2 =0.45; Wald χ^2 =262.85

[a] Conservative Party is the baseline. Results for SPD and Danish Party (N=8) are not presented here.

would be elected in a district (increasing the probability from 0.24 to 0.48). By contrast, the same move from the 10th to the 90th percentile in landholding Gini, holding all other variables constant, *reduces* the chances that a National Liberal would be elected from 50 percent to 11 percent. In similar fashion, though it is not visible in Figure 3, a shift from the 10th to the 90th percentile in landholding inequality marginally reduces the chances of the Center Party being elected (from 3 percent to less than 1 percent). A surprising result is that the Left Liberal Party, a strong advocate of suffrage reform, performed much better in areas with high landholding inequality (increasing its chances of being elected by 19 percent with a shift from the 10th to the 90th percentile).[74] The effects of shifts in landholding inequality in the Polish Party as well as in the even smaller Danish and Social Democratic Parties are less identifiable since the parties' representation was so small, making conclusive analysis difficult.

In addition to determining which parties got elected in the first place, did constituency characteristics impinge upon political parties at the moment they set their party lines? If we code each parliamentarian

[74] One possible explanation of this anomaly is the unusually urban character of the constituencies the Left Liberal Parties represented. The mean level of agricultural employment for the other parties' districts was 35 percent, while the Left Liberals were, along with the very small Social Democrats, the most urban party, representing districts with, on average, 16 percent of employment in the agricultural sector.
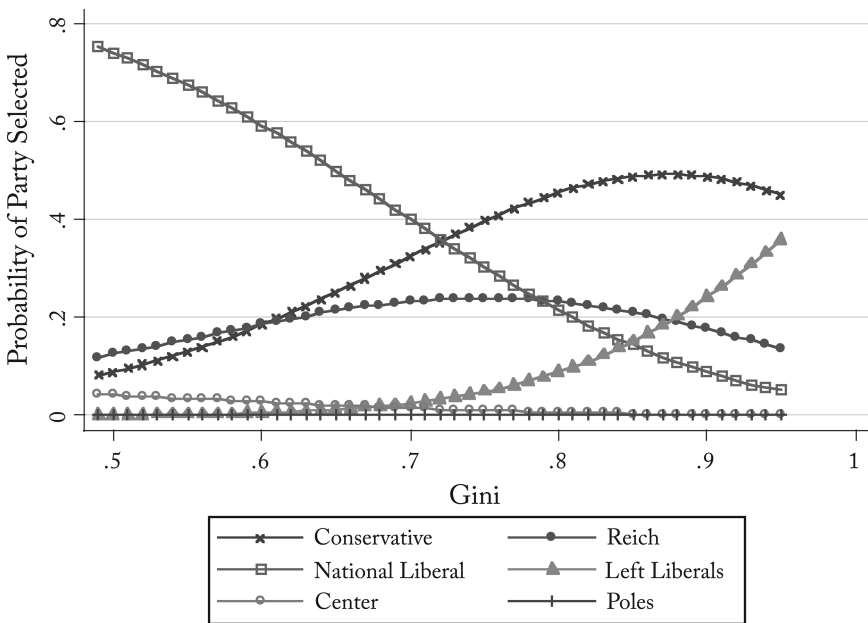
FIGURE 3
PREDICTED PROBABILITIES OF PARTY BEING ELECTED

dichotomously depending on whether his party's party line, or formal stance on the vote, was yes or no, we can use evidence from a series of difference of t-tests to see that party line is in fact highly correlated with the constituent characteristics and the average electoral incentive scores of each party. Each party's party line vis-à-vis the democratizing legislation of 1912 reflects the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the average districts they represented as well as their own electoral considerations. In districts represented by the two parties with a strong party line against democratic reforms (Conservatives and Reichspartei), there was significantly higher landholding inequality (p<0.001), a greater proportion of Catholics (p<0.001), less economic moderniza- tion (p<0.001), and greater electoral incentives to vote against the bill (p<0.001). By contrast, parties whose formal stance was prodemocratic had less to lose electorally and also represented districts that were more developed economically, had significantly lower landholding inequality, and a lower portion of Catholics (p<0.001 for all four variables).[75]

---

[75] It is also worth noting that although the decisive Catholic Center Party was programmatically in favor of suffrage reform, the party split on the 1912 vote in a way that reflected broader cultural and

In sum, in addition to providing, for the first time, systematic evidence linking landholding inequality and electoral incentives to Prussia's blocked democratization, the empirical analysis here provides additional evidence on the causal pathways through which these variables mattered. First, constituency characteristics largely determined which parties won in which districts and also appear to have influenced, along with electoral considerations, the party line of each party on democratization. Second, the existence of dissenters from the party line in the Center and National Liberal Parties indicates that party politics were not fully determinative of the vote, leaving open the possibility that underlying demographics and constituent characteristics also had a direct effect on legislators' decisions, unfiltered by party.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The date of May 20, 1912, was a revealing one in Prussia's difficult democratization. Given the historical importance of Prussia's pre-1914 history for Europe's twentieth century, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that leading post–World War II social scientific accounts have tended to elevate the "problem" of Prussia's pre-1914 democratization to a status that has made it virtually indistinguishable from the problem of democratization more generally. More surprising is that despite this attention, social scientific accounts of Prussian democratization have tended to treat it in a stylized fashion, highlighting its national trajectory across several centuries rather than exploring specific instances of reform, whether failed or successful. This article has, by contrast, focused on a single episode of reform that was historically important and that is, arguably, theoretically revealing.

There are three methodological payoffs of such an approach. First, we can bring the big macrocauses of democratization that normally concern political scientists down to earth, as it were, to analyze how these factors operated where actual decisions occurred, for example, at the level of politicians and political parties. Second, by doing so, we can

---

ideological divisions within the party. Center Party representatives from urban and more religiously mixed districts , who tended to be more progressive, disproportionately voted for the reform and Center Party representatives from rural and more homogeneously Catholic districts abstained, in effect voting against the reform. This reflected divisions on a range of issues between urban and rural factions inside the Center Party itself. See analysis in Rössel (fn. 29). See also discussion in Karl Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der Deutschen Zentrumspartei* (Cologne: J. P. Bachem, 1932); and Wilfried Loth, *Katholiken im Kaiserreich: der politische Katholizismus in der Krise der wilhelmischen Deutschlands* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1984). On the varied political consequences of the urban-rural split more generally, see Kühne (fn. 28), 52–55; 133–41, 575–77.

more effectively compare the relative weight of conventional hypotheses of democratization because rather than inferring from aggregate cross-national variation to make claims about change *within* countries, we can test hypotheses at the level of analysis at which we suspect the causal logic actually operates.

Finally, as in many other world regions, Europe's own regional trajectory of democratization might be usefully conceptualized less as a collection of unidirectional national paths and more as the accumulation of smaller episodes of reform, sometimes successful, sometimes failed but nearly always incremental. A focus on one of these episodes, though a failed one, gives us a more nuanced and fuller comprehension of the deeply contested process of democratization itself

Given this research design, the chief theoretical aim has been twofold: first, to assess the theoretical convergence between the "new structuralism" and Gerschenkron's older emphasis on landholding inequality's constraining effect on democratization; and, second, to assess whether interelite competitive dynamics do in fact shape politics of suffrage reform, above and beyond the distributional conflicts that normally underpin politics.

On the first issue, the findings in the article demonstrate that landholding inequality *did* negatively affect the prospects of democratization in Prussia. A striking secondary finding of this article, however, is that, against the expectations of Boix and Ansell and Samuels,[76] *income inequality* did not have a significant effect on the likelihood that politicians would vote for or against democratization. There are several implications worth considering. While political scientists have increasingly turned to economic inequality as a factor that affects the probability of democratic transition, it is crucial to utilize a more differentiated view of the concept, highlighting the variety of effects it might have depending on the type of economic inequality. Additionally, that land inequality, rather than income inequality, mattered in shaping the votes of parliamentarians suggests the possibility that Prussia's democratization was blocked not, as many prominent accounts have argued, by intensifying class conflict associated with rapid industrialization but instead by an enduring feature of Germany's preindustrial economic structure: rural landholding inequality.[77]

---

[76] Boix (fn. 3); Ansell and Samuels (fn. 3).

[77] This is a long-standing debate in German historiography. See, most prominently, Kehr (fn. 43). My finding supports Grant's (fn. 57) contention that a decline in income inequality by 1912 suggested the surprisingly diminishing relevance of industrial or class conflicts as a determinant of German politics in this period.

This basic insight that the inequitable distribution of immobile assets such as land can constrain democratization above and beyond level of economic development or even level of income inequality represents a broader and important caveat for theories of democratization. While there remains a tendency to presume that growing economic wealth by itself erases hierarchy, autocracy, and electoral corruption, this article's conclusion indicates the need for qualification: economic development that nonetheless leaves immobile assets inequitably distributed poses a problem for democratization. Indeed, while the historical period that is the subject here may have come and gone, the idea that immobile assets, whether land, minerals, or oil, exert a constraint on democratization is one that has enduring relevance.[78]

No matter how powerful this latter insight, this article also has had a *second* purpose: to demonstrate the importance of noneconomic factors, including above all the role of politicians' electoral considerations. The findings clarify that to understand the prospects of the successful democratic reform also requires putting politics into the causal story. At one level, this is unsurprising. Politicians seeking the power and status of elected office are unlikely to devise suffrage rules that put themselves out of power. But according to most theories of democratization, such moments of institutional design usually have the benefit of being done behind a Rawlsian "veil of ignorance," where old elites have limited access to the kind of information that would allow them to accurately make such calculations. After all, what Lord Derby called Disraeli's "leap into the dark" with Britain's Second Reform Act in 1867 was precisely about introducing uncertainty into politics.

So why in the case of Prussia might there have been less electoral uncertainty? It is here we see that Imperial Germany's distinctiveness was not only the structure of its economy but also *the institutional configuration* at the heart of its version of nondemocracy: a multilevel electoral system in which the national parliament was elected according to universal, direct, and equal male suffrage, while state assemblies were elected with restricted suffrage rules. This institutional setup gave political elites in Germany's states unusually high levels of information about how poorly they would perform if the subnational nondemocratic

---

[78] See, for example, Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53 (April 2001); Ben Smith, "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960–1999," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004); M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For an account that focuses on the distribution of rents from resources that is arguably compatible with the Gerschenkronian logic, see Thad Dunning, "Does Oil Promote Democracy? Regime Change in Rentier States" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

electoral systems were democratized. In this sense, pre–World War I Germany found itself in what could be dubbed a "partial-democratization trap" in which some democratization at the national level ironically blocked further democratization at the subnational level in the largest state of the federation.

In sum, while the socioeconomic lesson of Prussia's pre-1914 political life is parsimonious and generalizable, Prussia's failure to democratize was also partially due to a sui generis institutional structure that has not traveled beyond Germany's borders.[79] Yet Prussia's institutional distinctiveness should not lead us, as it did Gerschenkron, to focus exclusively on the socioeconomic roots of Prussia's political regime. To do so would be to overlook the general institutional lesson contained in Prussia's unique institutional experience: certain nondemocratic political institutions are more robust and hence more difficult to reform than others.[80] In addition to considering difficult distributional conflicts, students of democratization and authoritarianism need to focus on the diversity of nondemocratic political institutions and how they shape the prospects of stable democratization and the coalitions that make a peaceful democratic transition viable in the first place.

[79] Though the not unrelated phenomenon of "subnational authoritarianism" has attracted the recent attention of political scientists. See, for example. Edward L. Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics* 58 (October 2005).

[80] First-wave democratization has not been analyzed through the analytical lens of "durable authoritarianism." Yet this conclusion suggests a convergent line of future inquiry with recent work that examines in comparative perspective, the *institutional* roots of the persistence of authoritarian regimes. See, for example, Dan Slater, "Iron Cage in an Iron Fist: Authoritarian Institutions and Personalization of Power in Malaysia," *Comparative Politics* 3 (October 2003); Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Adam Przeworski and Jennifer Gandhi, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (November 2007); Beatriz Magaloni, "Credible Power Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (April 2008).