Week 4 - Political Elites, Intellectuals and Historical Precedents: Democratic Breakdowns in the Inter-War Period (1920-39)
• Why did the Weimar Republic collapse?

• Why did the other democratization attempts collapse in early twentieth century?

• Which social class is most democratic and leader of democratization?
  – Bourgeoisie?  
  – Workers?  
  – Landowners?  
  – Intelligentsia?  
  
  Liberals?  
  Leftists?  
  Conservatives?  
  Professors? 😊
• Which roles do intellectuals play in democratization in the contemporary world?

• What are their advantages and disadvantages?
Global wave of democratic revolutions

Wave of democratic revolutions before WWI:

Table 1. Democratic Revolutions of the Early Twentieth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Ottoman Empire</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement take-off</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic breakthrough</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary elections</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1913</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliament convenes</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament subjugated</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• Common points:

  – Prodemocracy movements unseated long-standing autocracies with startling speed
  – Considerable disorder accompanying democratization, leading new regimes to fail in numerous instances to uphold the rights and freedoms that they proclaimed.
  – Coups undermining democratic experiment (except for Portugal).
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• To what extent «democratic»?
  – Women were denied suffrage.
  – Illiterate men were disenfranchised in Portugal, as were poor men in several countries.

• But still, important steps:
  – Limiting the powers of the dictator, instituting competitive elections, and unleashing political debate through electoral campaigns, parliamentary sessions, and a vibrant press.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• Most importantly, millions of people participated in political affairs.
  – Voted, followed politics in newspapers.
  – Major growth of political constitutionalism, pluralism, and representation.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• Who will protect democracy?
  – Bourgeoisie?
  – Working class?
  – Middle class?

• These characters played their roles inconsistently!
  – democratic revolutions of this period were a jumble.
  – focus on the process rather than the identities of actors.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

- Role of «modern intellectuals»
  - In the decade before WWI, student groups, alumni groups, professional associations, study groups, literary circles, and so on formed the backbone of prodemocracy movements around the globe.
  - «Class consciousness» of self-defined intellectuals.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• Self-interested ideology
  – Intellectuals anticipated that people would recognize the intellectuals’ right to rule and vote them into office.

• Hegemonic ideology
  – Other groups believing non-opportunistic nature of democratic ideology proposed by intellectuals.
  – Workers, bourgeoisie, Great Powers.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• Intellectuals calculated well, created the alliance of «brains» and «numbers» and obtained power positions in new democracies.

• But they miscalculated the stability of this hegemony.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

• The pillars of support that had carried them into office crumbled, as the new ruling class ruled in its own interests.

  – The story of new democracies then, is one of alliances gained and lost.
Global wave of democratic revolutions

**Prodemocracy side**
- Hegemony of intellectuals over...
- Workers
- Capitalists
- Portions of the military
- Great powers

**Antidemocratic alliance** led by military and landowners

Hegemony disintegrated
Democratization in the 21st century

• The identity of the intellectual was linked once again with democracy movements.
  – Fluidity of class politics.

• Role of the intellectual in democratization
  – «long-term causes» may not be as important as short-term expectations.
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

- In 1920, 26 out of 28 European states were parliamentary democracies. By 1938, 13 of these democracies had become dictatorships. — Why?
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

Did the support of these masses (frustrated by economic crisis) bring down democracy?
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

Table 1. The Survival of Parliamentary Regimes in Europe's Interwar Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivors-1</th>
<th>Casualties-2</th>
<th>First Post-war Election</th>
<th>Initiation of Authoritarian Regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Feb. 1919</td>
<td>March 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>August 1919</td>
<td>June 1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia*</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>April 1919</td>
<td>March 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland*</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Jan. 1919</td>
<td>Jan. 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Nov. 1926</td>
<td>August 1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland*</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Nov. 1919</td>
<td>October 1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>April 1920</td>
<td>May 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>May 1920</td>
<td>Dec. 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Jan. 1919</td>
<td>May 1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>March 1919</td>
<td>May 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Nov. 1919</td>
<td>Feb. 1938</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>June 1931</td>
<td>July 1936</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Nov. 1920</td>
<td>Jan. 1929</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* : democracy founded after WWI
1 : smaller survivors, e.g. Iceland, have been eliminated.
2 : Hungary is left off the casualty list because it never succeeded in having free national elections.
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• Classical story: Economic scarcity in new democracies leads to a frustration among citizens who turn to extremist parties and against democracy itself: «collective madness».

• Or the role of elites?
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• No obvious relationship between the formal size of fascist groups and the likelihood of democratic survival. Even in Germany only about 2 percent of population Nazi members before coup.

  – Similar pattern in the relationship between voting behavior and likelihood of democratic survival.

• No pressure coming from below
  – General strikes, anti-government demonstrations and riots were no more common in the regimes that broke down than in the regimes that did not.
• Bermeo (1997): “with few exceptions, the interwar regimes broke down either because political elites deliberately chose {choice] to disassemble them—or because political elites unwittingly took actions [failure] that led to the regime’s collapse.”

• 6 authoritarian transitions (Hungary 1919, Italy 1922, Bulgaria, 1923, Portugal May 1926, Poland May 1926, Lithuania Dec 1926, Yugoslavia Jan 1929), before the 1929 economic crisis!
Not “an actively anti-democratic public” but state capacity to provide civic order may be a good predictor of the casualties.

Many of these states had not had enough time to build this capacity. “Crime statistics are just one indicator of the breakdown of civic order that preceded the collapse of all of these regimes… what united them all (the otherwise different dictators) was their promise to restore order.”
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• If not people, then **political elites** are responsible for the collapse of democracies.

• Little influence of ordinary citizens. Instead, role of conflicts among military or political elites.
  
  – Struggles which are not deriving from people’s frustrations.
Italy 1919 (elections)-22 (Mussolini comes to power)

- Massive Red / Anti-Red polarization

- But Mussolini (who played on fear of the “Reds”) had no popular mandate

- Liberal leader Giolliti invited him to National Block.
- King Emmanuel asked him to form government.
- When he “marched on Rome” next liberal leader Facta resigned and went home to bed.
- Military refused to defend the regime.
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• Breakdown of democracy in Austria in March of 1933
  – resemble the German case in that anti-democratic forces were widely popular and intensely active before the transition to dictatorship.
  – closest to the «madness argument»

• Breakdown of democracy in Estonia and Latvia in 1934
  – Certain level of societal involvement
  – Veteran’s Leage in Estonia and Thunder Cross in Latvia
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• Breakdown of democracy in Spain in 1936
  – Profoundly affected by its international context.
  – But domestic support for anti-democratic movements as well.

• General’s Revolt
  – Three years of civil war

• But still, limited influence of ordinary citizen
  – Move against the Republic in Spain was still the work of a small sector of the Spanish Right.
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• Breakdown of democracy in Greece in 1936
  – Major reason being electoral outcome that frightened the Right rather than the influence of popular forces

• Breakdown of democracy in Romania in 1936
  – Rise of the anti-Semitic fascist organization called the Iron Guard
  – Important responsibility of Carol II the King.
Collapse of democracies during the interwar era

• Differences in the level of popular support for the transition to dictatorship among cases.
  – Supportive mass movements like German case, or,
  – A total elite affair.

• But in almost all our cases, anti-democratic leaders gained control of the state;
  – Either because they were invited to rule by a King or President, or,
  – Because they seized power through military action.
Role of citizenry in the breakdown of democracy

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Prominent</th>
<th>Peripheral</th>
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<td>Austria</td>
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Conclusion

Ordinary Europeans had only a **peripheral role** in the demise of interwar democracies.

Maybe a better question would be why they wouldn’t or couldn’t stop it?