

2018

Review of Pedro Tavares de Almeida and Javier Moreno Luzón, eds. *The Politics of Representation: Elections and Parliamentarism in Portugal and Spain, 1875-1929*

Melissa Teixeira
University of Pennsylvania, mteixeir@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Teixeira, Melissa (2018) "Review of Pedro Tavares de Almeida and Javier Moreno Luzón, eds. *The Politics of Representation: Elections and Parliamentarism in Portugal and Spain, 1875-1929*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 1 , Article 23.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1307>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol43/iss1/23>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

Almeida, Pedro Tavares de and Javier Moreno Luzón, eds. *The Politics of Representation: Elections and Parliamentarism in Portugal and Spain, 1875-1929*. The Portuguese-Speaking World: Its History, Politics and Culture Series. Brighton, Portland and Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2018. viii + 273 pp. + 6 figures + 10 tables.

The Politics of Representation brings together eight chapters to explore the form and function of parliamentary politics in Portugal and Spain for the period from 1875 to 1929. It constitutes one of the few English-language collections on liberalism in this Iberian context for the half century before both nations fell under the heavy-handed rule of dictatorships, that of António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal and Francisco Franco in Spain. These essays take as their collective starting point the following questions: how is the liberal constitutional order stabilized or consolidated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and why does it fall apart in the 1920s? To approach an answer, the essays focus on parliamentarism and electoral behavior. Collectively, the authors reject the notion that parliaments and elections were of little consequence for Iberian public life and set out to show how these components of institutional and political development mattered. Taken together, the contributions highlight both the symbolic and practical importance of ballot boxes and parliamentary chambers, as well as their impact on national politics.

Editors Pedro Tavares de Almeida and Javier Moreno Luzón emphasize the importance of this joint discussion of Spain and Portugal because of the historical parallels between these two countries, as well as the similarities across their political cultures. For Spain, 1875 marked the beginning of the Bourbon Restoration under Alfonso XII, which closed decades of civil wars and political instability. This new political system put an end to this turmoil with the system of *turnismo*, an informal pact between the two major parties to alternate power. This system survived almost fifty years, yet it was gravely weakened in 1898 with Spain's loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. It finally came undone in 1923 with the military coup staged by General Miguel Primo de Rivera. Portugal's political history shares much in common with Spain's in these years, but with key differences. The year 1878 marked the consolidation of the constitutional monarchist regime with political reforms. This new system also functioned with *rotativismo* between two leading parties – the Regenerator and Progressive Parties – that mirrors the Spanish *turnismo*. But Portugal diverged from Spain in 1910 with the overthrow of the Monarchy and establishment of the Republic. This First Republic fell short of its promises for full political democratization and was plagued by turmoil until it too was deposed in May 1926, by the military *coup* that gave rise to Salazar's Estado Novo. While this timeline presents fertile ground for comparison, the editors might have gone further in explaining the value of studying

Spain and Portugal side by side, and thereby intervening in wider debates on political liberalism and its crises in the early twentieth century. The epigraph that opens the Introduction implores: “Compare yourself with other! Know what you are!” (1). Still, each of the volume’s chapters focuses on a single country, with none featuring a comparative methodology. The Introduction might have been expanded to include a dialogue across these chapters in order to highlight to readers what is learned about the political practices of liberalism from this comparative exploration.

The book has eight chapters, organized in two parts. Part One discusses electoral behavior and parliamentary recruitment patterns. Portugal’s voting system implemented in 1884 is directly influenced by the Spanish 1878 law. Despite this convergence, as well as similarities in terms of weak civic participation and prevailing clientelism, important differences marked electoral patterns in each country. Of particular interest, Portugal greatly expanded electoral suffrage in 1878, and then steadily restricted this suffrage in the decades to come. Spain, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction: it implemented a restrictive census-based suffrage in 1878, but then re-implemented universal suffrage in 1890. This seems to be an important divergence between the two contexts, and one that could have been further explored. Part Two is dedicated to parliaments, namely its internal procedures, political role, and legislative actions. Here, contributing authors explore the political dynamics of parliaments and representations of parliaments in the public sphere, specifically in novels, cartoons, and photography.

Chapter One, “Elections and Parliamentary Recruitment in Portugal” by Pedro Tavares de Almeida, considers the primary trends in electoral reforms in the period from 1878 to 1926, as well as the profile of parliamentary deputies. In total, eleven electoral laws were passed in this period, which resulted in an incredible amount of instability given that the “rules of the game” were constantly changing (8). Specifically, the 1878 law expands suffrage dramatically, to its peak (for this period) of about 19% of the total population (9). For political elites, the calculation seems to have been that expanding suffrage was a way to respond to rising criticism from socialist, republican, and other radical political campaigns, without truly opening up the political arena. Electoral institutions remained heavily influenced by *caciquism*, which was especially strong in rural areas, with the rural electorate far outnumbering more radical urban voters. Over the next fifty years, various laws were passed to restrict and expand suffrage, with universal male suffrage never established in Portugal for the period in question. The change in regime from Monarchy to Republic did not appreciably impact this trend, even as the sociological profile of deputies expanded to include individuals of more modest social origins and those employed in commercial and liberal professions. Almeida suggests that this fifty-year sequence of reform without change contributed to the

“symbolic erosion and political delegitimization of the representative institutions” (32).

Chapter Two, “Elections in Spain” by Carlos Dardé, outlines changes to electoral rules during the Bourbon Restoration. Dardé suggests that with *turnismo*, elections were not “superfluous or irrelevant,” but they were also not the linchpin of the political system (39). The chapter analyzes the three electoral laws passed in this period: in 1878, 1890, and 1907. The first of these laws, implemented by a Conservative government, restricted suffrage; the second, issued by a Liberal government, decreed universal male suffrage; while the third, presented by another Conservative government, aimed to eradicate corruption from the electoral system, namely the entrenched *caciquism*. Dardé also highlights other trends that impacted parliamentary recruitment, namely the importance of family ties and the “professionalization of politics” (60).

Chapter Three continues the discussion introduced in Chapter Two regarding the economic, social, and professional characteristics of deputies in Spain. In “Prosopography of the Spanish Deputies,” María Antonia Peña and María Sierra consider the personal and professional profiles of this political class in order to better understand the political processes of the Restoration. The authors present an overview of the methodological and analytical value of prosopographic studies as part of a “new political history” that is attentive to “sociocultural explanations of political action” as well as the role of the “individual as a historical subject” (69). The authors emphasize the major challenges they face: limited records available to fulfil a complete and systematic study of this group numbering almost 3,500 deputies. With the available data, Peña and Sierra present preliminary assessments on the length of parliamentary service and the professional background of Spanish deputies, emphasizing the importance of combinatorial methods. By taking into account the diversification of assets and the linkages between sectors – rather than insist on classifying individuals according to fixed and exclusive categories – the authors highlight the economic transformation taking place. This more encompassing approach to professional interests, as well as the observation that liberal professionals increased their election to government in these years, allows the authors to dispel the “historiographic cliché” that deputies were captured by an uneducated agrarian elite (85).

The following five chapters explore the functioning of parliaments in Portugal and Spain, as well as their representations in the public sphere. Chapter Four by Paulo Jorge Fernandes, “The Political Role and Functioning of the Portuguese Parliament” considers the formal role and activity of Parliament in Portugal from 1878 to 1926. It aims to go beyond the negative assessments often launched against Parliament as a weak, corrupt, and ineffective institution, criticisms that were mobilized by the anti-liberal Estado Novo dictatorship and that have survived to the present-day. Fernandes both explains the relation between

Parliament and other branches of government as well as the work dynamic within its Chambers, including legislative initiatives. The chapter outlines that Portugal's transition from Monarchy to a Republic brought greater parliamentary instability, making it more difficult for this organ to exercise its constitutional responsibilities.

Chapter Five, in turn, grapples with the continuities and discontinuities of Parliament in Portugal, to account for the impact of the 1910 Republican Revolution. Fernando Catroga, in "The Parliamentary Model of the First Portuguese Republic: Legacies and Discontinuities," considers the impact of republicanism on political life. The author links the rise of republicanism in Portugal to nineteenth-century intellectual and scientific currents – like positivism, biological and social evolutionism, and secularism – and to the rise of the social question. The revolutionary potential of republicanism came to the forefront with the 1910 overthrow of the Monarchy. While the new republican regime departed from the old one in significant ways – especially in terms of the separation between church and state – the liberal Constitution of 1911 failed to address the social question and included few mechanisms to regulate and resolve political conflicts. The *Estado Novo* would amplify these weaknesses in order to legitimize its overthrow of this liberal order, and benefit from how the seeds for alternatives to parliamentarism (like corporatism) were already influential in 1911.

Chapter Six considers some of these questions for the Spanish case. Miguel Martorell Linares, in "Legislation, Accountability and Consensus in the Spanish Parliament" discusses the role of Parliament by addressing a critique often launched against this institution: in the words of one contemporary, "here one discusses but does not legislate" (157). The author explains both why it was difficult for the *Cortes* to pass legislation – the difficulty of obtaining large parliamentary majorities – but also contends that legislating was not the primary duty of this organ. Rather, Parliament was a venue for public debate, and less a "legislative machine." This is because the liberal state, with its limited fiscal resources, did not have the capacity to issue much legislation. The *Cortes* played an important role in organizing political elites into the two-party system, channeling political conflict through this institution, and also was the organ for oversight over the government, holding its members accountable (158). This system broke down in 1923, in part because it had failed to respond to the crises of World War I with legislative action, and in part because of the breakdown of *turnismo* as new parties gained force.

The final two chapters consider the representation of parliamentary politics in literature, iconography, cartoons, and other media. Paulo Silveira e Sousa and Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro, in "The Images of Parliament in Portugal: Literature, Iconography and Politics," discuss what literary and artistic representations reveal about politics. While literature and art should not be taken as factual representations of society, they reveal – often with irony or mockery – the moral and political shortcomings of the liberal parliamentary system, as well as

critiques of the perceived “backwardness” of Portugal (197). Novelists and poets were often themselves very close to power, part of Portugal’s intellectual and political elite. With the rise of positivism, naturalism, and social realism in the late nineteenth century, these literary representations increasingly exposed political scandals, economic misery, and the pernicious impact of corruption, yet often with the disparaging portrayal of popular classes as “an infantilized and often brutal mass” (204). These criticisms of representative democracy were echoed in the cartoons and photography that circulated in Portugal’s public sphere. Such indictments of Portugal’s political culture contributed to the crisis of parliamentary liberalism and to rising enthusiasm for anti-liberal and authoritarian forms of governance in the 1910s and 1920s. Chapter Eight, “Literary and Cartoon Representations of Spanish Parliamentarism” by Javier Moreno Luzón, examines cultural production for the Spanish case. These literary and visual representations of parliaments, like in the Portuguese case, highlighted the vices and faults of the political class. An important branch of this literature focused on provincial life in rural Spain, highlighting the corruption and manipulation on account of local *caciques* that “subjected the nation to an unbearable tyranny” (221-222). This pessimism increasingly pervaded art and literature on politics in the early twentieth century, which in turn inspired public calls to eradicate Parliament rather than attempt reform. Both of these chapters present a thorough overview of the importance of literary representations for understanding the crisis of parliamentarism in Portugal and Spain. Still, how did the levels of illiteracy for both countries impact the relative importance of texts versus image in the public sphere? Did visual representations impact popular engagement with politics, or popular sentiments about parliaments?

This volume provides important and compelling analysis of two cornerstones of the liberal constitutional regimes of Spain and Portugal: voting and parliaments. It considers the political transformations and institutional developments of Iberia in the fifty years before both countries fell to long-lasting corporatist and authoritarian dictatorships. Collectively, the essays go beyond simplistic explanations for the “crisis of liberalism” that led to the rise of Franco and Salazar by exploring the function and practice of parliaments, giving texture to these critical years that are too often skimmed over. We now have a comprehensive collection of figures, data, and qualitative evidence to understand the political instability of this period. In other words, we now have a clearer picture of what the crisis of liberalism looked like for Spain and Portugal.

Still, certain important events were left untouched in the volume. Spain’s loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines is mentioned only in passing, even though this loss of empire in 1898 was no doubt a moment of intense crisis for Spain’s domestic political life. In a similar vein, Portugal’s own imperial crisis in 1890 with the British Ultimatum is absent from this political history. How did

parliaments absorb or react to these geopolitical shocks? While the overthrow of Portugal's Monarch in 1910 receives adequate attention in chapters on Portugal, the authors might have gone further to contend with how regime change impacted political life. Elections and parliamentary life also sometimes appeared detached from the wider economic and social transformations faced by both countries in these years. How were these parliaments vessels for, or expressions of, the tensions, conflicts, and anxieties that marked the rise of industrialization, the social question, and imperial crises? Concluding remarks might have provided an opportunity for the editors to reflect on some of the wider implications of this collection of scholarship, not just for the historiography of modern Spain and Portugal but also for the study of liberalism and political development at this crucial juncture.

These questions now become fertile ground for future research, opened up by this valuable collection. Overall, this is a welcome addition to the political history of Portugal and Spain. It will be especially relevant to scholars who work on liberal constitutionalism and its practices, political culture, and political development, as well as scholars interested in contextualizing the roots of the Franco and Salazar dictatorships.

Melissa Teixeira
University of Pennsylvania