



# Democracy and the Politics of Electoral System Choice: Engineering Electoral Dominance

By Amel Ahmed

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Amel Ahmed brings new historical evidence and a novel theoretical framework to bear on the study of democratization. Looking at the politics of electoral system choice at the time of suffrage expansion among early democratizers, she shows that the electoral systems used in advanced democracies today were initially devised as exclusionary safeguards to protect pre-democratic elites from the impact of democratization and, particularly, the existential threat posed by working class mobilization. The ubiquitous use and enduring nature of these safeguards calls into question the familiar picture of democracy moving along a path of increasing inclusiveness. Instead, what emerges is a picture that is riddled with ambiguity, where inclusionary democratic reforms combine with exclusionary electoral safeguards to form a permanent part of the new democratic order. This book has important implications for our understanding of the dynamics of democratic development both in early democracies and in emerging democracies today.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"By focusing on the strategies and motives of pre-democratic political elites, Ahmed's comparative analysis sheds new light on the determinants of electoral reform in early democratizers. Her study shows how the careful reconstruction of the politics behind key institutional choices can provide significant insights into the process of democratization as a whole. This book breaks new theoretical and empirical ground, and will constitute important reading for scholars of democratization in all periods."

Giovanni Capoccia, Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Oxford

"Democracy and the Politics of Electoral System Choice investigates the political origins of democracy in the nineteenth century. In a fascinating twist on politics-as-strange-bedfellows, Amel Ahmed finds that economic elites supported democratic electoral institutions to safeguard their own positions in the new democratic order. This wonderful, counter-intuitive, myth-busting book holds crucial lessons both for students of institutional analysis and for those who care about the abysmal performance of party politics in the post-industrial age."

Cathie Jo Martin, Professor of Political Science, Boston University, and former chair, Council for European Studies

"In this comparative analysis of the evolution of electoral institutions in Belgium, Britain, France, and the United States, Amel Ahmed pushes forward the agenda of 'historicizing' the study of democratization. The result is an argument that rethinks these crucial cases but also has a broader lesson: methods of exclusion and containment rather than being antithetical to democracy may, historically, have been at the heart of democracy itself. This provocative and important insight should be taken seriously by scholars of contemporary authoritarianism and democracy as well as by students of political institutions more generally."

Daniel Ziblatt, Professor of Government, Harvard University

#### About the Author

Amel Ahmed is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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