Online Appendix to "Reading History Forward"

Jørgen Møller

Professor, PhD

Department of Political Science

Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

E-mail: jm@ps.au.dk

Introduction

This Online Appendix contains three parts. First, two additional examples are used to show how large-N studies that have analyzed the period after 1945 have generalized their findings without recognizing the scope conditions they rest on, thereby committing selection bias. Second, the problems associated with retrospective inquiry and the potential benefits of a more forward-looking approach are illustrated via a review of a new body of research on the rise and development of medieval representative institutions/parliaments. Third, a subsequent example, centered on the debate about the strength of the German Imperial parliament up until World War One, shows that the problems associated with retrospective inquiry can also affect the work of historians.

Large-N studies inferring from post-1945 findings

The most egregious example of reading history backward in recent research are probably the series of large-N studies which commit selection bias by inferring findings from a post-1945 sample, without recognizing that certain scope conditions associated with this period might either have suppressed the relationship that is being investigated or rendered it artificially strong, and that it therefore cannot be projected further back in time. In the article one example, based on the literature on the so-called "Ghent effect", is used to illustrate this. Two other examples show that this is a more common problem. First, Boix (2011) challenges a number of studies that have found little evidence of a positive relationship between modernization and democracy. Boix points out that these studies are mainly based on data from the period after 1945 and goes on to show that the Cold War competition between the USA and the Soviet Union suppressed the relationship between the level of modernization and democracy levels in this period. Extending

the analysis back to 1800, Boix finds a strong and robust relationship between modernization and democracy. Second, Krishnarajan (2019) shows that a set of surprising null findings about the relationship between economic crisis and irregular leader removal in autocracies owe to studies solely analyzing this relationship in the period after 1960 where autocrats have had access to stabilizing funds from natural resources which have allowed them to stave off the negative political effects of economic crisis. Extending the analysis back to 1875, Krishnarajan documents a robust effect of economic crisis on irregular leader removal in autocracies.

Medieval representative institutions *redux*

This section critically reviews a new and influential literature on the development of medieval representative institutions or parliaments (Stasavage 2010; 2011; 2016; Van Zanden, Buringh, and Bosker 2012; Blaydes and Chaney 2013; Boucoyannis 2015; Abramson and Boix 2019).[1] The approach is the one introduced in the article: I discuss how the new body of scholarship on medieval parliaments has dealt with the research question, how it has defined the explanandum, what data have been enlisted, and what the upshots of this are for the explanations that are presented. This is matched with some of the insights that we find among historians who have approached these institutions in a more open-minded way.

The research question

To understand why the new scholarship on representative institutions or medieval parliaments has tended to read history backward, we need to understand what has sparked this research

[1] Some of this author's prior work can be added to the category of analyses of medieval representative institutions that read history backward (particularly Møller 2014 but to some extent also Møller 2017: Chapters 17-20).

agenda in the first place. When reading the introductions of the work referred to above, it is clear that the new interest in medieval representative institutions is motivated by the more general research agenda on the economic and political effects of "institutions of constraints" (North and Thomas 1973; North and Weingast 1989; North 1990; Jones 2008 [1981]; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001; 2002; Acemoglu et al. 2008; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). In the very first paragraph, Stasavage (2010:625) thus references both Douglass North and Acemoglu and Robinson, Blaydes and Chaney (2013:16) reference their very first sentence with work by North and Acemoglu and Robinson, and Van Zanden et al. (2012:835-36) refer to both North's and Acemoglu and Robinson's work in their Introduction.

More particularly, Stasavage (2010:625), Van Zanden et al. (2012: 835-36), and Blaydes and Chaney (2013:16) take as a point of departure the notion that representative institutions constrained executives and that this increased tax intakes, enabled public deficit finance, and spurred economic efficiency by protecting property rights. They then ask what – considering these ostensible advantages – explains the variation in the timing and strength of representative institutions across Western and Central Europe and why these institutions did not appear elsewhere? Abramson and Boix's (2019) vantage point differs as they see parliaments as endogenous to economic growth (or more precisely urban economic growth). However, they, too, construe parliaments as "constraints on the executive".

It is this interest in the downstream effects of political constraints that has made the new scholarship on medieval representative institutions read history backward rather than forward. But by asking what caused institutions of constraints in the form of medieval representative institutions, the answer is biased in the direction of certain explanatory factors, namely those for which a plausible case can be made that they served to politically constrain rulers. What is

ignored here is the possibility that, especially in the early phases, these institutions did not constrain rulers; indeed, that rulers might have introduced them to augment their power (Boucoyannis 2015) – or, to mention another possibility, that they were an unintended by-product of attempts to deal with other problems, such as litigation in ecclesiastical circles (Møller 2018a).

Defining representative institutions

Stasavage (2010:630) and Abramson and Boix (2019:802-3) present a very general definition that mainly stresses that assemblies are independent of rulers whereas Van Zanden et al.'s (2012:837) definition basically describes a late medieval assembly, including its membership (three or four estates) and its prerogatives. These definitions identify institutions that had already begun to systematically constrain monarchs; in other words, institutions of constraints. The crucial characteristic captured by these definitions – and used to delimit the concept – is that representative institutions provided an independent political pole in a regime that also included a monarchical pole (see also Poggi 1978:47-48). This, again, owes to the retrospective interest in understanding the origins of institutions of constraints.

These definitions ride roughshod over a point of consensus among medieval historians: the first lay representative institutions were called on royal initiative to exercise power, and they did little or nothing to constrain executives (Boucoyannis 2015). Kagay (1981:360) terms representative institutions a "child of the monarchy", Bisson (2009:559) refers to assemblies as "implements of lordship", Oakley (2012:158) ironically notes that they created "self-government

at the king's command", and Bradford and McHardy (2017:xiii) call them a "royal instrument".[2] Until some assemblies claimed and won the right to fixed convocations, summoning of assemblies was exclusively a *regalian* right and both participation and consent to the decisions arrived at was compulsory (O'Callaghan 1975:439; Maddicott 2010:141; Oakley 2012:157-8). This must be the point of departure for understanding the origins of representative institutions but the backward projection of representative institutions as constraints on the executive has made the new literature slight this point.

Only recently, Boucoyannis (2015) and Stasavage (2016) have proposed that we look beyond parliaments as institutions of constraints and instead focus on the key practices on which they were based, namely the two judicial concepts of proctorial representation and consent, derived from revived Roman Law. This focus on representation and consent is entirely in line with how medieval historians have long approached representative institutions (Post 1964:61-63; Monahan 1987:111-126; O'Callaghan 1989:14-15; Oakley 2012:155). One of the great benefits of aligning the concept with the understanding of medieval historians in this way is that this allows us to attest exactly when representative institutions were first called and when these institutions spread from one polity to another.

However, even Boucoyannis (2015) and Stasavage (2016) fail to present an open-minded approach to the explanandum in one respect. They retain the focus on secular assemblies, which clearly follows from the retrospective emphasis on how lay rulers in Western and Central Europe came to be constrained. They thereby ignore another important insight of prior historical scholarship on representation and consent, namely that these practices were first invented within

[2] Van Zanden et al. (2012:844) mention that parliaments were created by sovereign top-down but they do not pursue this point (see also Stasavage 2011:48-53).

the Catholic Church and only later spread to lay polities (Post 1964:66, 124; Southern 1970; Tierney 1982; Berman 1983; Monahan 1987; Black 1992; Kay 2002; Bisson 2009:8-9; Bradford and McHardy 2017:xv-xvii; cf. Finer 1997:1029-1032; Oakley 2003; 2012:138-159; Møller 2018a).

The historical data enlisted

The new literature on medieval representative institutions is almost solely based on large-N statistical analysis. Stasavage (2010) has compiled a dataset covering 24 European polities in the period 1250-1800, which he uses to test whether geographical size mattered for the frequency with which assemblies were called (based on fifty-year intervals, censored so that 1 per year is the highest score) and the prerogatives that they came to have. Van Zanden et al. (2012) have gathered a similar dataset for 32 polities, registering the number of calendar years with assemblies per century (ranging from 0 to 100). This they use to provide a descriptive overview and to analyze whether parliaments mattered for the economic divergence between northern and southern Europe, proxied by city growth. Abramson and Boix (2019) extend Stasavage's and Van Zanden et al.'s coding and compile a dataset covering more than 300 polities.[3] They code these units annually but their analysis enlists the same measure as Van Zanden et al., that is, the fraction of years with assemblies per century (ranging from 0 to 1). On this basis, they analyze whether institutions of constraints caused economic growth or whether – as they argue – both growth and assemblies were caused by initial economic conditions, proxied by early urban density. Finally, Blaydes and Chaney (2013) use Stasavage's (2010) and Van Zanden et al.'s

[3] Moreover, Abramson and Boix (2019) code assemblies where townsmen did not participate, thereby remedying some of the most problematic aspects of the retrospective approach to medieval parliaments.

(2012) data to test whether their own numismatic data on ruler duration predicts institutional constraints in the form of convocations of parliaments.

These research designs have consequences for the kind of data that these analyses enlist. While Stasavage (2010), Van Zanden et al. (2012), and Abramson and Boix (2019) rely on historical sources to code their datasets, they mainly do so based on what, as mentioned in the article, Hexter (1979:241) calls "source-mining". Prior historical work is thus used to code variables across cases, not to provide in-depth knowledge about within-case developments.[4]

This is a very general use of the historical data which has a number of strengths with respect to generalization but which also means that most of the abundant qualitative information historians have produced about medieval parliaments – a subject to which historians have devoted "perhaps more scholarly attention than any other subject within the institutional history of medieval Europe" (Cerda 2011:62) – cannot be used in the empirical analysis. While the new literature on representative institutions draws theoretical insights from this body of work (see e.g. Stasavage 2010; Van Zanden et al. 2012; Blaydes and Chaney 2013), it shies away from analyzing this narrative data and instead solely interrogates macro-level developments based on quantitative datasets.

Explanatory repercussions

The consensus in the new studies of medieval parliaments is that representative institutions were created when strong social groups could police monarchs. According to Blaydes and Chaney (2013), the root cause of representative institutions is to be found in feudalism as a decentralized

[4] A partial exception is Stasavage (2011), which contains historical case studies.

military system that empowered the nobility at the expense of monarchs.[5] Van Zanden et al. (2012:846) similarly observe that "[p]arliaments reflected the 'fragmented authority' that was so characteristic of 'feudal' Europe" but their main explanation for the advent of representative institutions lies elsewhere, namely in the reemergence of towns as vibrant economic forces after 1000 AD (847). On this point, they are in line with Abramson and Boix (2019:795), who single out "the initial conditions of urban development" around 1200 as crucial for the later development of representative institutions.

Stasavage (2016) has attempted to rise above these more particular explanatory factors and understand what is at stake more generally. He combines the focus on strong social groups with his own prior finding that small size enabled vibrant representative institutions Stasavage (2010; 2011). Representative institutions were thus the product of small polities and relatively weak rulers. Stasavage (2016) explains these two characteristics with the havoc wreaked by the Germanic invasions in the early middle ages and the ensuing 9th and 10th century breakdown of order in most of Western Europe.

One way of thinking about this is to say that these are different explanations for the same political equilibrium, namely one where – as the Van Zanden et al. quote makes clear – strong societal groups could balance monarchs (see also Møller 2014; 2017: Chapters 17-20; 2018b). This illustrates how the retrospective perspective has made scholars single out the factors that allowed strong groups to constrain rulers. It also shows how these analyses "freeze history" by taking a cyclical view centred on equilibria.

[5] For a related criticism of their (backward-looking) use of feudalism as an explanatory category, see Møller & Skaaning (2018:16-18).

As mentioned in the article[6] that this Online Appendix is an addendum to, a more specific example of how the retrospective perspective has blinded scholars is to be found in the observation – which has erroneously been repeated in much of the literature on medieval assemblies (Myers 1975:59-60: Marongiu 1968:61–62; Van Zanden et al. 2012:838; O'Callaghan 1969:1513-1514; Boucoyannis 2015:315, fn. 86) – that the first genuine representative institution was called by king Alfonso IX in the realm of Leon in 1188. This is but one among many examples of an observation that makes its way into history and social science, henceforth to be repeated without scholars actually investigating the basis for it. What we know is that Leonese townsmen attended the 1188 assembly (as they would again in 1202 and 1208), and that they had in some way been chosen by their towns (the formulation we have is "*et cum electis civibus ex singulis civitatibus*") (Reynolds 2012[2000]:108; Procter 1980:107-108). But it does not follow that they attended as genuine representatives of their town councils (*concejos*). There is in fact no evidence that townsmen arrived as proctorial representatives based on Roman Law (Reynolds 2012[2000]:108).[7] Furthermore, this is entirely implausible given that medieval historians agree that the invention of proctorial representation at assemblies dates to Innocent

[6] Some of the section that follows is identical to the one in the article but this Online Appendix section more fully references prior research and includes some additional historical information (see fn. 7).

[7] If we broaden the definition to capture some vaguer form of de facto political representation (not based on Roman Law), Leon 1188 also loses its claim to priority. Townsmen were definitely called by King Alfonso II of Aragon to an assembly at Zaragoza on November 11, 1164 (Post 1964:71-73; Kagay 1981:41–42). We know that the town councils of Zaragoza, Huesca, Daroca, and Jaca sent so-called *adelantados* (Zaragoza 16, Huesca 6, Daroca 7, Jaca 4). There were not proctors in the Roman Law sense (there is no evidence that they were defined as such) but there were so few of them that they must have represented the town councils in some way (Kagay 1981:41-42), at least to the same extent that town councils were represented in Leon in 1188 (Kagay 1981:fn. 2; Post 1964:71-73). Hence, there was a looser kind of urban representation – not based on Roman Law – in 12th century Iberian assemblies (Post 1964:78-79).

III's and Honorius III's pontificates in the period 1198-1227 (Kay 2002; Bradford and McHardy 2017; Oakley 2003; 2012:138-159).

A more open explanatory approach is one that asks why first popes and their agents (papal legates, nuncios or archbishops) and *then* kings and emperors started calling representative institutions and that, on this basis, maps the early use of proctorial representation empirically (Møller 2018a). But these processes have been completely ignored in the new literature on representative institutions due to the bias created by the explanatory premise that representative institutions constrained lay rulers.

The German *Sonderweg* and the German *Reichstag*

Historians also sometimes read history backward. A good example can be found in The *Sonderweg* debate on German history. It has taken as a point of departure that Germany's political development was different from other Western or European countries in the 19th and first half of the 20th century; propelling the country not toward liberal constitutionalism and democracy but rather toward authoritarian stability and then, in the interwar period, democratic breakdown (Ledford 2003).

Against this background, *Sonderweg* historians have emphasized Germany's political backwardness prior to 1933. Their under-estimation of the German *Reichstag*'s parliamentary sovereignty from 1871 to 1914 provides a text-book illustration of reading history backward. [8] The notion here has been that part and parcel of the German *Sonderweg* was the political

[8] A related example is what has been termed "Nazi-pedigree hunting", that is, the attempt of especially German historians to find the roots or precedents of Nazism in pre-1914 German intellectual thinking (Blackbourn and Eley 1984).

impotence of the Imperial parliament before World War One, at the very point in time when other European political regimes experienced full parliamentarization.

Kreuzer (2003) has attempted to turn the tables on the many historians who have made this argument. According to Kreuzer, the finding that the German parliament was very weak vis-à-vis the imperial government rests on an implicit use of the Westminster model as the benchmark, that is, a tacit comparison with the United Kingdom. However, once we broaden the comparison to other European parliaments of the day, the German Imperial *Reichstag* turns out not to be exceptional or, for that matter, particularly weak. On the contrary, on most relevant dimensions, it was a rather strong parliament. The main exception was its weak role in government formation, or more particularly the nomination and investiture of ministers. This of course means that the parliamentary principle did not operate (see Cornell et al. 2020). But on other dimensions – including government dismissal and legislative powers – the Imperial parliament was actually strong in comparative perspective.

Kreuzer's analysis can be interpreted as a forward-looking check on a dominant backward-looking interpretation. The very fact that Imperial Germany did not democratize before World War One and that Weimar Germany experienced democratic breakdown in the interwar period has made scholars emphasize the dimensions where the pre-1914 German parliament was weak, ignoring both those dimensions where it was strong and failing to see that the implicit comparison is with what is in fact a rather anomalous case, namely the extremely strong parliament of the British Westminster system. Kreuzer's corrective opens up the possibility that Germany was in fact *en route* to a democratic transition on the eve of World War One and that the Interwar breakdown of the Weimar democracy had more to do with the war defeat in 1918

and the economic and social dislocations of the 1920s and 1930s than a historically predestined *Sonderweg*.

References

Abramson, S. and C. Boix. 2019. "Endogenous Parliaments: The Domestic and International Roots of Long-Term Economic Growth and Executive Constraints in Europe." International Organization 73:4: 793-837.

Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J.A. 2012. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. London: Profile.

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S. and Robinson, J.A. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation". *American Economic Review* 91(5):1369-1401.

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S. and Robinson, J.A. 2002. "Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution". *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117(4):1231-1294.

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., Robinson, J.A. and Yared, P. 2008. "Income and Democracy". *American Economic Review* 98(3):808-42.

Berman, Harold J. 1983. *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bisson, Thomas N. 2009. *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Black, Antony 1992. *Political Thought in Europe 1250-1450*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blackbourn, David and Geoff Eley. 1984. *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boix, Carles. 2011. “Democracy, Development, and the International System.” *International Political Science Review* 105(4):809-828.

Bradford, Phil and Alison K. McHardy. 2017. *Proctors for Parliament: Clergy, Community and Politics, c. 1248-1539*. The Boydell Press: The Canterbury and York Society.

Cerda, José M. 2011. “The Assemblies of Alfonso VIII of Castile: Burgos (1169) to Carrión (1188).” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 3(1):61-77.

Cornell, Agnes, Jørgen Møller, and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2020. *Democratic Stability in an Age of Crisis: Reassessing the Interwar Period*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Finer, Samuel E. 1997. *The History of Government II: The Intermediate Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, E.L. 2008[1981]. *The European Miracle. Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kagay, Donald J. 1981. *The Development of the Cortes in the Crown of Aragon, 1064-1327*. ETD Collection for Fordham University.

Kay, Richard. 2002. *The Council of Bourges, 1225: A Documentary History*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Kreuzer, Markus. 2003. “Parliamentarization and the Question of German Exceptionalism: 1867-1918.” *Central European History* 36(3):327-358.

Krishnarajan, S. 2019. “Economic Crisis, Natural Resources, and Irregular Leader Removal in Autocracies”. *International Studies Quarterly* 63(3):726-741.

Ledford, Kenneth F. 2003. “Comparing Comparisons: Disciplines and the *Sonderweg*.” *Central European History* 36(3):367-74.

Maddicott, John. 2010. *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924–1327*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Marongiu, Antonio. 1968. *Medieval Parliaments: A Comparative Study*, Vol. 32. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.

Monahan, Arthur P. 1987. *Consent, Coercion, and Limit: The Medieval Origins of Parliamentary Democracy*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Myers, A.R. 1975. *Parliaments and Estates in Europe to 1789*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Møller, Jørgen (2014). "Why Europe Avoided Hegemony: A Historical Perspective on the Balance of Power", *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4): 660–670.

Møller, Jørgen (2017). *State Formation, Regime Change, and Economic Development*. London: Routledge.

Møller, Jørgen. 2018a. "The Ecclesiastical Roots of Representation and Consent". *Perspectives on Politics* 16(4): 1075-1084.

Møller, Jørgen 2018b. "Medieval Roots of the Modern State: The Conditional Effects of Geopolitical Pressure on Early Modern State Building". *Social Science History*, 42(2): 295-316.

Møller, Jørgen and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2018. "The Ulysses Principle: A Criterial Framework for Reducing Bias When Enlisting the Work of Historians." *Sociological Methods & Research*.

North, D.C. and Thomas, R.P. 1973. *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

North, D. C. and B. Weingast. *1989*. "Constitution and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England." *The Journal of Economic History* 49(4):803-32.

North, D.C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oakley, Francis. 2003. *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300-1870*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oakley, Francis. 2012. *The Mortgage of the Past: Reshaping the Ancient Political Inheritance (1050-1300)*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

O'Callaghan, J.F. 1969. The Beginnings of the Cortes of Leon-Castile. *The American Historical Review*: 1503-1537.

O'Callaghan, J.F. 1975. *A History of Medieval Spain*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

O'Callaghan, J.F. 1989. *The Cortes of Castile-Léon 1188-1350*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Poggi, G. 1978. *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Post, Gaines. 1964. *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State 1100-1322*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Procter, E.S. 1980. *Curia and Cortes in León and Castile 1072-129*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reynolds, Susan. 2012 [2000]. "Government and Community." In *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West*, edited by Susan Reynolds, pp. 86-112. London: Ashgate.

Sharma, Vivek S. 2017. “War, Conflict and the State Reconsidered.” In *Does War Make States? Investigations of Charles Tilly’s Historical Sociology, e*dited by Lars Bo Kaspersen and Jeppe Strandsbjerg, pp. 181-217. Cambdrige: Cambridge University Press.

Southern, Richard W. 1970. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. New York: Penguin Books.

Stasavage, David. 2010. “When Distance Mattered: Geographic Scale and the Development of European Representative Assemblies.” *American Political Science Review* 104(4):625-643.

Stasavage, David. 2011. *States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stasavage, David. 2016. “Representation and Consent: Why They Arose in Europe and Not Elsewhere.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:145-62.

Tierney, Brian. 1982. *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Zanden, Jan L., Eltjo Buringh and Maarten Bosker. 2012. “The Rise and Decline of European Parliaments, 1188-1789.” *The Economic History Review* 65(3):835-861.