



Issues on European Political elites

Luca Verzichelli
Jean Monnet EUReACT
Academic year 2016-2017

Old and new Elitism

- Mosca [1896] and the idea of the *Ruling class*
- Pareto [1916] and the dynamics of the *Elite circulation*
- Michels [1911] and the *iron law of oligarchy*
- Weber and Shumpeter are also considered *classic elitists* although their notion of elite is already “contemporary”.
- The debate in North America between *pluralists* and *elitists* and most of the behaviouralist scholars are inspired by the European theory of elites
- Even a “neo-marxist elitism”?
- A new paradigm? Robert Putnam [1976] claims for a comparative and empirical approach. Later, Higley and Field propose a new theoretical perspective based on “new elitism”

Elites and the question of democratic transformation

- New elitist approach built on Shumpeter and Lasswell
(Sartori, *the theory of democracy revisited*, 1987)
- Different focus on elite theory from the studies of democratic dynamics
(Huntington, *the Third wave*, 1991 vs. Przeworski and others)
- Focus on policy outcomes and transformation of policy communities
(different approaches)
- Cultural and historical path dependencies
(Putnam, *making democracy works*, 1993, *Bowling alone*, 2000)
- Elite centred theories not mentioning elites:
 - Actor-centred institutionalism
 - Rational choice institutionalism

Persistent emphasis on elites' role but with some variations

Elites should rule. **But they are differently responsible and differently stratified** (*experts, networks, interactions ...*).

Citizens choose between elite proposals **but by means of different democratic tools.**

Result should be an efficient government **but with new system of control over elite's action.**

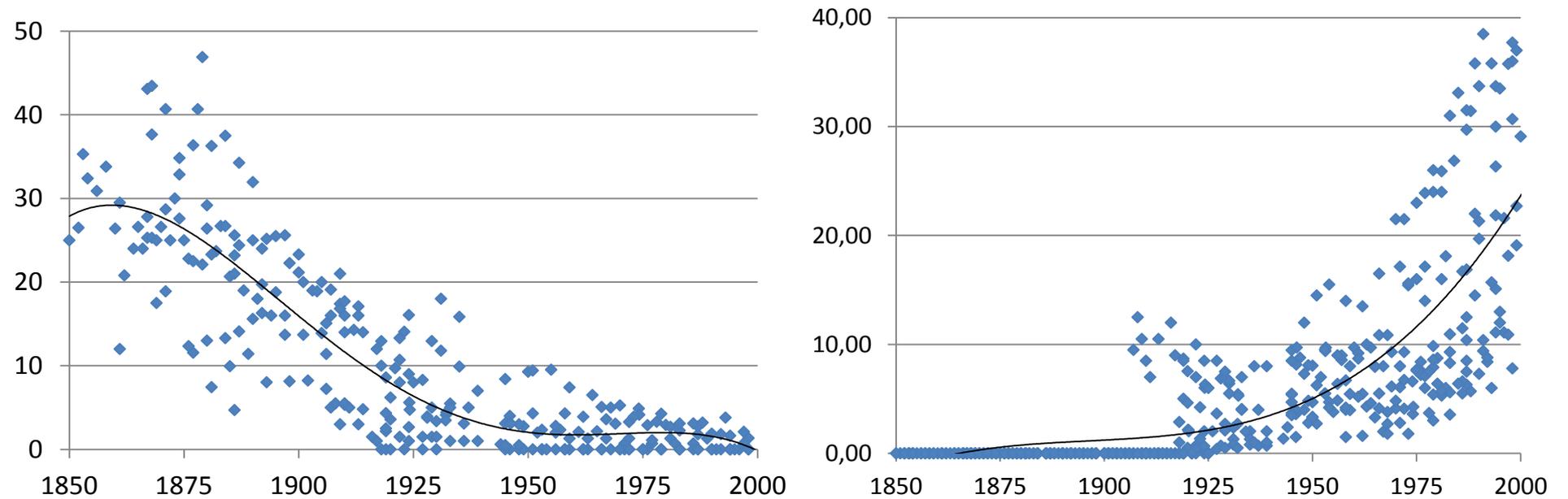
Politics is still too (or even more) complex for average citizens. **But we should avoid apathy**

Redefining all the representative institutions

Challenges to elites or other?

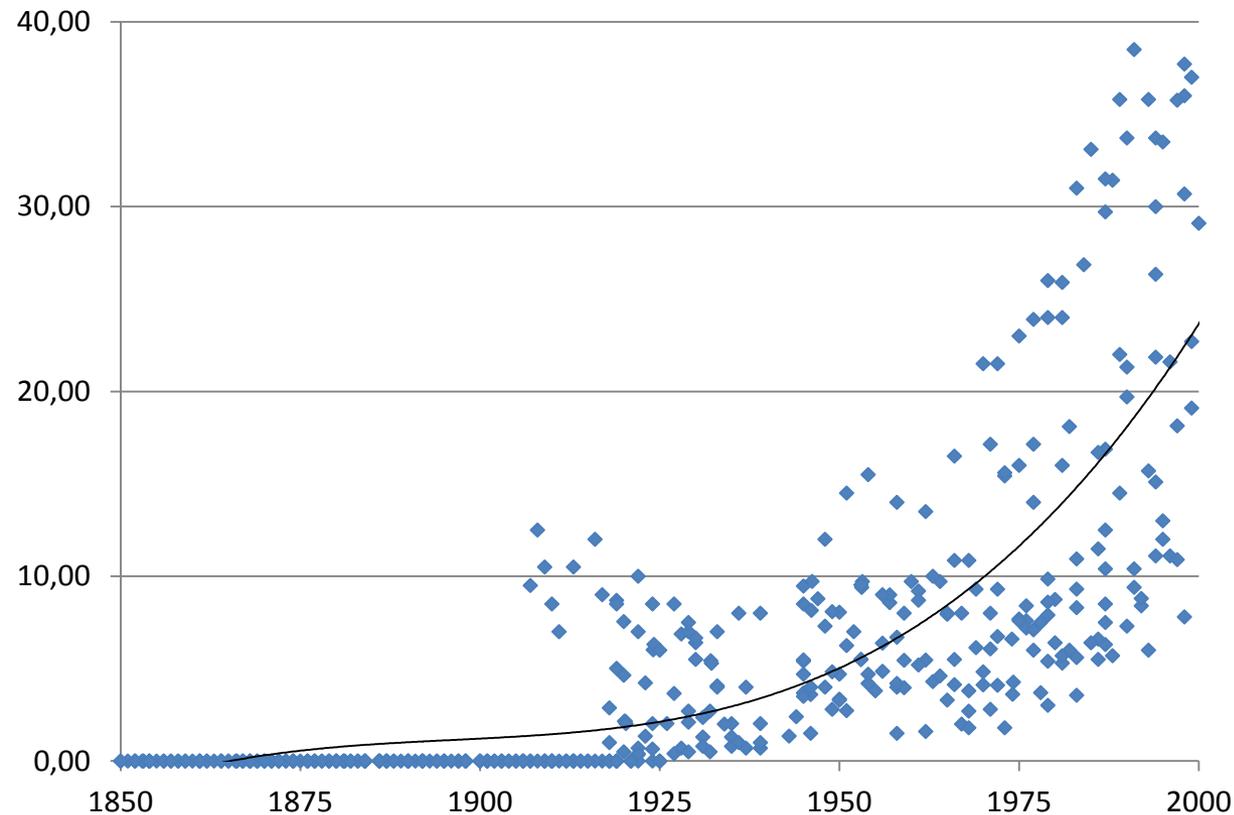
- Reintroducing the argument of the *decline* of representative institutions (quest for *participatory democracy* and *deliberative democracy*)
- Decline of party-democracy and emphasis on public opinion (Manin)
- Counter-democracy and new social pluralism (Rosanvallon)
- Still a relevant role of representative institution but challenges from social complexity, immigration, etc.

Putnam's lesson: bridging long term elite transformation to macro-explanations



A classic picture of long term parliamentary elite change: the decline of nobility and the rise of party professionals (Cotta and Best 2007)

Female Representation



- A long process of normalization?
- Too much variance?
- Cultural issue or a normative one?
- Up to the ladder ... Still a male-dominated elite