



## DISSERTATION SPOTLIGHT: A RESPONSE TO LOTEM HALEVY

*By Jason Wittenberg*



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When it comes to Eastern Europe, we take for granted the primacy of nationalism as the empires that had ruled the region prior to World War I gave way to nominal nation-states in the interwar period. Lotem Halevy's "The Origins of Nationalist Constituencies: The Interests that Mobilized the Passions" offers a revealing new interpretation of how this nationalist primacy came about. Through a deep dive into the politics of Dualist Hungary, where the masses were electorally disenfranchised, she argues that the state's reluctance to provide social services to its diverse populations gave an opening to emergent sectarian (nationalist) political parties, who sought to foster mass loyalty through civil society organizations engaged in apolitical service provision. Once these constituencies were bound by common interest through an organization, Halevy argues, they became sites of exclusionary nationalist appeals. The result was the post-World War I predominance of nationalist parties in areas within the Kingdom of Hungary's former territory.

Halevy deserves credit for recognizing the importance of non-state social service provision, and with it the creation of interest-based groups, to nation-building in only minimally democratic countries such as Hungary prior to World War I. Her focus on the relationship between welfare and nation-building is uncommon in contemporary political science but does harken back to a regrettably forgotten older literature that documented, mainly through case studies of Western Europe, the way in which political parties established links with such associations and thereby created stable ideological constituencies. One of Halevy's novel contributions is her discovery and analysis of a comprehensive database of voluntary associations for the Kingdom of Hungary during the Dualist period. Among other things

this allows her to distinguish between associations that provide services, and thereby create an interest-based group where successful nationalist mobilization is more likely, from other kinds of associations.

I do have one important quibble with the argument, at least the newsletter version of it, and it relates to the implications. Halevy states that, "[t]he provision of goods and services by emergent parties provides a partial explanation for why dominant parties of the old regime were replaced in the interwar period with the parties which rose to fill the void during the Dualist period." I assume based on the reference to dominant parties that the interwar territory under consideration is that of post-Trianon Hungary rather than minority-inhabited territories of the Hungarian Kingdom that were awarded to neighboring countries. (There were no dominant non-ethnically Hungarian parties during the Dualist period.) It's true that the old dominant parties played little to no role in interwar Hungary, but that has far more to do with their being held responsible for the dismemberment of historic Hungary than any effort other parties made to mobilize their relatively modest constituencies. A more compelling argument might be made for the emergent Dualist-era ethnic minority parties, which might well have leveraged their decades of mobilization activities to enter the new parliaments in the Habsburg successor states.