

An outstanding contribution to the growing literature in world-systems theory, Kathleen Schwartzmans study of the first Portuguese republic demonstrates the significant ways in which a nations social and political structures are shaped by its position in the global economy. In May 1926, a military coup ended Portugals first turbulent, sixteen-year experiment with democracy. During that period no less than 45 prime ministers and an equal number of coalition cabinets failed to solve the nations complex economic and political problems. Portugal and its far-reaching colonial empire exerted tremendous international influence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its subsequent decline as a sea power, military defeats, the gradual loss of its colonies, and an inability to compete with industrializing nations, however, left it stranded on the periphery of the world economy. Schwartzman shows how the collapse of the First Portuguese Republic resulted from its marginal place in the world economy, a highly fragmented domestic economy, the failure to forge a social compromise between classes, and the inability to create stable political coalitions. This study, which reframes national politics within the world-systems paradigm, enhances our understanding of why some democracies are more fragile than others and, thus, more vulnerable to authoritarian takeover. Equally significant, Schwartzmans theoretical contributions suggest important new directions for sociologists, political scientists, and economists using world-systems theory to examine developing nation states within the global economy.

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