

# Democratizing from Within: British Elites and the Expansion of the Franchise

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## Abstract

We develop a theory of democratization that relies on political and electoral calculations to explain the franchise choices of political actors. Left-leaning (liberal) politicians, who, given their location in the policy space, are more likely to receive the support of newly enfranchised voters, favor a broader franchise than conservative ones. Their preferences are conditional on the interests of both enfranchised and disenfranchised electors. As those interests become more heterogeneous, policymakers are more reluctant to expand the franchise because it may be harder to attract new voters while keeping their current supporters. We evaluate this theory by estimating the franchise preferences of British MPs based on their votes on franchise-related parliamentary divisions between 1830 and 1918, and linking these preferences to their personal and constituency characteristics. In line with our theory, we find that partisanship, declining inequality and World War I were crucial factors in the democratization of Britain.

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Great Britain stands out in the democratization literature as the paragon of a gradual and nonreversible political process leading, through the balanced expansion of liberalization and participation, from a “closed hegemony,” to use Dahl (1971)’s words, to a “polyarchy”. Over almost a century, British ruling elites broadened the franchise, roughly doubling it every generation—from less than one in eight men to about one in six after the First Electoral Reform of 1832, one in three in 1867, over half of all males in 1884, and universal male suffrage and quasi-universal female suffrage in the Fourth Electoral Reform of 1918. The reforms were passed and implemented peacefully, fostered the formation of competitive parties willing to lose an election and to take turns in government, and, even during periods of intense political conflict, experienced no episodes of democratic backsliding. By contrast, most of continental Europe grappled with a more fractious democratization process, characterized by intense political polarization, revolutionary outbursts, and authoritarian reversals. The revolution of 1848 ushered the introduction of democracy in France and Germany—but only for a few years. Military defeat then acted as the midwife of liberal democracy in France in 1870 and in the central empires in 1918. Whereas Britain (and the few small European countries whose democratization route resembled Britain’s) withstood the political and economic challenges of the interwar period, Weimar collapsed in the wake of the Great Depression, Italy’s liberal democracy and Spain’s republic lasted for about five years, and France’s national assembly surrendered all its powers to Marshall Pétain in 1940.

To explain the nature and causes of Britain’s long march to democracy (and, more generally, the process of democratization in a peaceful and settled manner around the world), the scholarly literature has put forward three main types of explanations: that incumbents deliberately concede democracy with the aim of retaining their political advantage in the future representative regime (O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1986; Collier, 1999; Ziblatt, 2017; Riedl et al., 2020); that a particular economic and social context makes democracy feasible (Lipset, 1959; Moore, 1966; Boix, 2003; Ansell and Samuels, 2014); and, finally, that the success of democracy depends on the strength of popular mobilization (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Levi, 1997; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001; Przeworski, 2009). Here, we integrate most

of these theories' key explanatory propositions, which we see as complementary to each other, to suggest a unified theory of democratization.

Our theory is based on the assumption that political incumbents (understood as those individuals that have the formal authority to determine the rules of the game) choose a constitutional regime strategically, that is, to maximize their chances to retain office (and meet their constituencies' interests). They do so constrained by two main factors: the structure of electoral competition, which is defined by the parties competing for office and the distribution of policy preferences of the current and (once the reform is passed) future electorate; and, the mobilization and resources of non-incumbents.

More precisely, the franchise (and overall democratic) preferences of political representatives are determined as follows. First, left-wing (in our analysis, which relies on British data, Liberal) parliamentarians are more favorable to loosening suffrage requirements than right-wing (Conservative) MPs because, given their location in the policy space, they are more likely to receive the support of newly enfranchised voters. Second, Liberal legislators prefer modest, rather than significant, franchise extensions so as to minimize the risk of successful entry by a new party on their left. Third, these electoral calculations (and therefore their suffrage preferences) are mediated by the nature and interests of both enfranchised and disenfranchised voters. In the short term, incumbent legislators are constrained by their existing policy platforms—which must have been preferred by the median enfranchised voter in their constituencies to the platforms of their opponents. Consequently, in more heterogeneous constituencies, representatives will be more reluctant to expand the franchise, because it will be harder for legislators to reconcile the policy preferences of their existing and newly enfranchised voters in those seats. This last point is in line with standard economic models of democratization, which emphasize the role of a (wider) income distribution in preempting the expansion of the franchise. Finally, the toleration of MPs for democracy varies with the economic and financial costs borne by enfranchised individuals to enforce the exclusion of a part of society from voting.

We evaluate our theoretical expectations by describing and examining the preferences of the members of the British parliament regarding the size of the franchise during the United

Kingdom’s long gradual march to democracy. To explain why Britain’s elites decided to embrace democracy, we use ideal point estimation to measure legislator preferences regarding the male franchise, employing information on how members of the House of Commons voted on franchise-related divisions between 1830 (two years before the First Electoral Reform) to 1918 (when universal male suffrage was passed).<sup>1</sup> Following Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017)’s analysis of legislator preferences on U.S. civil rights, we use actual information on the real or potential franchise effects of reform proposals to increase the accuracy and inter-temporal comparability of ideal point estimates. However, we improve on their approach by also using information on the precise male franchise implied by particular votes (on a 0 to 100 percent scale), in order to produce numerical estimates for the male franchise preferred by each MP, also on a 0 to 100 percent scale. This exercise allows us to map how far, when, and which British elites favored (partial or full) democratization. In doing so, we also contribute to ideal point estimation literature by showing how information about bill content can be used to estimate the specific policy views of each legislator.<sup>2</sup>

We then amalgamate data from various sources to assemble a rich constituency-election level dataset combining information on MPs’ franchise preferences with information on legislator and constituency characteristics. We use regression analysis to examine how MPs’ (male) franchise preferences varied with their party, parliament, and personal and constituency characteristics. It is important to emphasize that the main goal of our empirical analysis is to explain the overall (gradual) process of franchise extension in the British case rather than why one specific

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<sup>1</sup>We do not study MP preferences on female suffrage in this paper for two reasons. First, our focus is, in part, on examining the implications of changing economic considerations for legislator preferences on extending the franchise to poorer men, the issue that dominated the suffrage question for most of our period. We believe that the economic considerations associated with expanding the franchise to some or all women are more complex, and that different factors may have been important in shaping legislator preferences on female suffrage (see, also, Przeworski (2009); Teele (2018)). In line with this, in our data, we find that (especially Conservative) legislators often voted differently on questions of male and female suffrage. Moreover, few divisions dealt solely with the question of female suffrage, leading to more imprecise and unstable estimates of legislator preferences on this issue. We leave exploring this topic to future work.

<sup>2</sup>The process of political liberalization was not limited to the expansion of the franchise but also accompanied by equally fundamental reforms to abolish rotten boroughs, suppress the sale of votes, secure the secrecy of the ballot, and so on. For important historical work on this direction, see Mares (2015). However, looking at these issues using our approach would require examining a different set of roll call votes, and so we leave this endeavor to future work.

reform bill failed while another bill (proximate in time) was adopted. Still, after presenting our main results, we discuss how the franchise preferences we estimate shed light on the extension, pace and limits of reform bills and which was the role that MPs' strategic behavior may have played in their passage.

In line with our theoretical expectations, we consistently find, first, that there was a persistent partisan gulf on the franchise question, with Liberal MPs favoring a much larger male franchise than their Conservative contemporaries—the partisan gap was, all else equal, more than 50 percentage points between the 1840s and 1910s. Second, MPs representing constituencies with higher earnings inequality were less supportive of franchise expansion, regardless of party—moving from a highly equal to a highly unequal constituency implied a drop of 10 to 20 percentage points (depending on specification) in MPs' preferred male franchise. Third, we find that an increase in the costs of excluding non-enfranchised individuals reduced the level of opposition to expand the franchise. To that effect, we exploit the shock of World War I, which we take to be exogenous to the forces of social and economic development that could be affecting both voters' policy preferences and their organizational capacity. Concerned about the need to incentivize the military mobilization of men and worried over the spread of considerable social and labor unrest across Europe, previously reluctant (mainly Conservative) MPs embraced universal male suffrage.

Our findings contribute to two (interrelated) strands of research: democratization theory and more specific work on the causes and dynamics of British democratization. (Because these research agendas are interrelated, we mainly discuss our contributions to both agendas simultaneously.) As pointed out earlier, this article strives to combine the main existing explanation of democratization into a more unified theoretical account, presenting empirical evidence to support it, as follows. In line with an important current within incumbent-led theories of democratization (Collier, 1999; Teele, 2018), we begin by modeling democratization reforms as processes driven by the strategic choices of an internally divided (as opposed to a cohesive) authoritarian elite. Indeed, we find in our empirical analysis that the British political elite was anything but unified until very late in the period we examine. Intra-elite divisions over the

scope of an electoral reform, which were considerable, occurred both across and within parliamentary parties, often making the extension of the franchise a rather contentious political issue. Moreover, contrary to some claims in the literature on elite concessions, democratization came, in most cases, from the political left. Conservatives resisted democratization reforms most of the time—and when they sponsored or approved them, they did as an act of damage control.

To understand the sources of elite divisions, we integrate the second class of theoretical arguments on democratic transitions (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006), which have stressed the role of economic or redistributive interests in explaining political reforms, into the incumbent-based theory of democratic transitions. More precisely, the extension of the franchise depended on the variance in interests and level of electoral mobilization of both enfranchised and potential future voters. Our constituency-level evidence indicates that declining inequality was important for shifting MP attitudes toward democratization. These results have direct relevance for the debates on the political economy of democratization. They support work that shows that democratization is related to the structure of distributive interests along income and wealth distribution (Boix and Stokes, 2003; Ziblatt, 2008; Dasgupta and Ziblatt, 2021) rather than to demands from sector-based coalitions (Llavador and Oxoby, 2005). It also questions previous research that sees British elites deliberately extending the franchise to guarantee public goods provision (Lizzeri and Persicò, 2004) and/or stable property rights (Ansell and Samuels, 2014). In fact, these policy outcomes turned out to be the consequence (rather than the cause) of extending the franchise to particular social groups with specific policy interests.

Finally, we embed in our theory the third class of models that see the level of popular mobilization as affecting the position of political incumbents toward the franchise. Here, our contribution is mostly methodological. Industrialization and economic growth affected both the preferences of the electorate (for example, by moderating them) and its organizational power (for instance, by increasing the educational resources of the poor). Accordingly, it is difficult to disentangle the political (democratizing) impact of the latter (the mobilizational capacity of the unenfranchised) from the former (a change in economic interests) employing social and

economic variables. To measure the democratizing effect of a change of organizational resources among the disenfranchised, we use what we believe is a novel empirical strategy: we leverage the shock of World War I, which was arguably orthogonal to the economic transformations experienced by the British electorate. The war of 1914 triggered a wave of collective unrest across Europe, ranging from the Russian Revolution of February 1917 to French soldiers' mutinies in the spring of that year. Against that transnational context, which signaled an upward shift in the resources of labor and underrepresented groups, a substantial number of Conservative MPs dropped their historical opposition to universal suffrage. In other words, democratization became more likely as non-enfranchised individuals became politically stronger—in line with work by Aidt and Jensen (2014) and Aidt and Franck (2015), among others.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 summarizes the state of the field on democratic transitions with a particular focus on the nature of causes of peaceful processes of democratization (such as Britain's long march to free and fair elections with universal suffrage). Section 2 develops our theoretical expectations about the democratic preferences of political agents involved in choosing the male franchise. Section 3 discusses the methods we employ to estimate the franchise preferences of British MPs. Section 4 presents our estimates of MPs' franchise preferences. Section 5 relates MPs' ideal points to personal and constituency characteristics using regression analysis. Section 6 discusses the implications of popular mobilization for MPs' franchise preferences, as revealed by the effects of the social unrest sparked by the First World War. Section 7 concludes by linking our results to the existing research on democratization.

## 1 Related Literature

In the last decades, a rich literature on democratization has offered three main classes of theoretical arguments to explain democratic transitions and, in particular, regime changes conducted in a peaceful and settled manner.

In the first class of models, incumbents (mainly, individuals or parties holding office and/or controlling parliaments) deliberately decide, in order to maximize their chances of retaining

power over time, to start a democratic transition. Incumbent-led accounts can be divided, in turn, into three main subcategories: transitions engineered by a relatively unified elite; transitions resulting from competition among divided elites; and transitions where incumbent elites explicitly make a pact with the opposition to bring in democracy. In Riedl et al. (2020), a unified incumbent class embraces democracy (in response to growing pressure from a domestic opposition and/or foreign actors) when it calculates that it can stay in power, that is, when it is strong enough to do well after democratization. In the particular case of Britain and, more generally, Europe, Ziblatt (2017) equates this to the presence of a well-institutionalized and professionalized conservative party capable of drawing support across geographical and class divides. Divided elites, in turn, have been seen as engaging in democratization to carve out more electoral support among newly enfranchised electors (Collier, 1999; Teele, 2018). In Llavador and Oxoby (2005) elites democratize to construct a sector-based coalition to defend their particular economic interests—in the specific case of Britain, with industrialists and landowners trying to neutralize each other by giving the vote to urban workers and peasants respectively. Finally, stable democratization is the outcome, according to O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986), of an explicit settlement between the authoritarian incumbent and the democratizing opposition.

The second family of explanations, which emphasizes the role of social and economic interests in shaping the (probability) of a peaceful democratization process, has a long lineage in the discipline. Moore (1966) famously attributed the institutionalization of democracy to the decline of landed interests and a successful “bourgeois revolution”. Lipset (1959) linked democracy to the rise of a modern middle class. More recently, a number of redistributive models of democratization see conflict as happening between an authoritarian minority and a non-enfranchised (generally poorer) majority (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006): here, unequal societies are, generally speaking, less likely to democratize.<sup>3</sup> Using data at the electoral district level, Mares (2015) shows how local economic conditions led conservative candidates

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<sup>3</sup>In Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), highly unequal societies also democratize as authoritarian elites expand the franchise in response to an revolutionary threat.

to push for electoral manipulation to neutralize the redistributive effects of male universal suffrage in imperial Germany. Ansell and Samuels (2014) emphasize, instead, an intra-elite conflict, specifically between an agrarian elite and an emerging industrial bourgeoisie, as the source of democratization: in their account, land inequality undermines democracy but income inequality does not.

Finally, the exact channels through which this process takes place vary across authors. Whereas democracy follows from the rise of a permanently well-organized working class in Rueschemeyer et al. (1992), it does in the wake of a transient insurrectionary threat that autocrats meet by extending the franchise in Acemoglu and Robinson (2001). For Levi (1997) and Tichi and Vindigni (2010), twentieth-century total war (and the conscription needs it generated) exacerbated popular resentment and weakened elites, precipitating the transition to democracy. Notice that, even though the rise of democratic demands among the disenfranchised also plays a role in both incumbent-led and redistributive theories—since, without them, political agents would have no incentives to move to democracy, two features distinguish these theories from a strictly mobilizational explanation. First, according to the latter, authoritarian elites concede democracy even when they may be unable to remain in power after the transition. Second, mobilizational theories tend to pay much less attention to the conditions that lead to settled and stable democracies as opposed to unsettled ones.

## 2 Theory

Building on incumbent-led theories of democratization that see (mostly divided) elites as making institutional reforms for strategic reasons, we sketch a theory of legislators' franchise preferences as follows. Consider, as a starting point, a parliament where politics is played on a single policy dimension that stretches from right to left—and that is broadly correlated with social status and income.<sup>4</sup> Initially, only high-status (or high-income) voters, located to the right of the policy space, are enfranchised—making the legislature a sum of a “committee of

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<sup>4</sup>The application of ideal-point estimation techniques to all divisions in the House of Commons from 1832 to 1918 typically recovers a unidimensional policy space. See Appendix B.3.

landlords”, to use Barrington Moore’s expression, and some urban and commercial interests. At election time, two candidates, who may be labeled as Liberal and Conservative, compete for a seat in a single-member district.<sup>5</sup> Liberals locate to the left and the Conservatives to the right of the median enfranchised voter.<sup>6</sup> Their position is constrained by the following concerns. First, they only move in the policy space slowly due to reputational costs and the worry that they may lose the vote of existing supporters. Second, they consider the possibility of entry by a third candidate (Shepsle, 1991). Finally, voters primarily cast their vote for the candidate with the policy position closest to their ideal policy, but their choice is also affected by some non-policy considerations, such as candidate valence, incumbency, and idiosyncratic individual tastes for particular candidates. As a result of these non-policy considerations, some voters do not vote for the candidate closest to their ideal point. However, the probability that voters support a candidate is still decreasing in their policy distance from the candidate.<sup>7</sup>

One of these candidates is assumed to be an incumbent legislator, with the party of the incumbent varying depending on the electoral district. Before the election, the incumbent decides whether or not to support any further expansion of the franchise (and by how much). In making this choice, the incumbent considers how franchise expansion will affect his vote share and, therefore, chances of re-election. This depends on two broadly construed factors: the structure of the electoral market (or, more precisely, the nature of voters still to be enfranchised) and the costs of repression. In addition, legislator franchise preferences are affected by individual economic interests and status.

**Electoral Market and Non-enfranchised Voters.** Due to the relative stickiness of the candidates’ policy positions, the preferences of an incumbent legislator over franchise extension will not depend primarily on the preferences of his existing supporters, who have no reason

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<sup>5</sup>Although many districts in the United Kingdom for the period until 1885 were multi-member districts, in the vast majority voters had as many votes as parliamentarians to be elected, and therefore their decision-making followed the logic of plurality in single-member constituencies. Thus, for simplicity, we limit attention to the single-member district case.

<sup>6</sup>See Cox (1997) for a derivation of a Duvergerian equilibrium in single member districts.

<sup>7</sup>Implicitly, our theory of voting is in line with a probabilistic spatial voting model, where some candidates may be systematically advantaged on non-policy grounds, as in Adams (1999) and Merrill III and Adams (2002).

to abandon him so long as his policy platform remains unchanged. They will instead depend on the likelihood that newly enfranchised voters will support the incumbent's existing policy platform over either the platform of his opponent or that of a new entrant. More precisely, because franchise expansion leads to more participation by poorer and more left-wing voters, newly enfranchised voters will tend either to favor Liberal over Conservative candidates, or to support a new entrant on the left if the positions of the Liberal and Conservative candidates are sufficiently far from the new voters' ideal point.

Entering an election is costly to a new (third-party) candidate. New entrants are at a considerable disadvantage relative to competitors from established parties: they have to build some programmatic credibility among voters; they need to convince voters that enough of them will coordinate against the old candidates; they face important costs in terms of voter mobilization; and so on. In effect, third party entrants face a valence disadvantage relative to established candidates. Already enfranchised voters will not likely vote for a new entrant because, given that they are relatively close to already existing parties, the expected ideological gain to voters from voting for the third party candidate (even when he is slightly closer to the voters' ideal point) will be outweighed by their assessment of the candidate's valence disadvantage. In the case of a franchise expansion, the new entrant can only therefore hope to attract (in substantial numbers to make his run successful) newly enfranchised voters significantly to the left of the Liberal candidate—and only if the new entrant takes a position to the left of the Liberal candidate. Given these conditions, incumbent legislators will only choose to expand the franchise to a sufficiently limited level (or not expand at all) such that successful entry never occurs.

If incumbent legislators are only willing to support an expansion of the franchise when they anticipate they would have a higher chance of being re-elected under the new franchise (without significantly changing their policy platform), it follows that they will be more likely to approve it when the policy preferences of their existing voters and those of newly enfranchised voters (i.e. the old and new constituency medians) are closer to each other. This is the case because, in line with the logic outlined above, a new entrant will only choose to enter (on the left) if there are enough new voters whose views are sufficiently left-wing that they would still prefer

the new entrant to the incumbent—taking into account any idiosyncratic considerations and the advantages held by established candidates.

The logic presented above implies two testable hypotheses, which we discuss in turn.

*H1.* Liberal legislators, who typically support a more left-wing policy platform than their Conservative opponents, will be more supportive of franchise expansion than Conservative legislators.

Since newly enfranchised voters will tend to be located on the left of the policy space, Liberal candidates can expect to receive more support from these voters, even without changing their policy offering, than can Conservative candidates.<sup>8</sup> At any point in time, Liberal legislators will prefer a modest expansion of the franchise, relative to the status quo at that time, over a more significant franchise expansion. This is because a modest franchise expansion will minimize the expected distance between the old and new constituency medians, diminishing the risk that newly enfranchised voters will instead be mobilized by a new entrant on the left.

*H2.* The franchise preferences of incumbent legislators will also depend on the socioeconomic characteristics of their constituencies, including the level of inequality—in line with a main body of work within the social and economic approach to the causes of democratization.

Insofar as voters' policy preferences are correlated with their income, the policy distance between the old (i.e. before franchise expansion) and new (i.e. after franchise expansion) constituency medians is likely to be higher in more unequal constituencies. Accordingly, Liberal legislators will be less supportive of franchise reform in more unequal constituencies because they may be less confident about winning the support of newly enfranchised voters, who will favor a significantly more redistributive policy platform, and might be more easily mobilized by a new entrant on the left. For the same reasons, insofar as Conservative legislators also hope to receive some support from newly enfranchised voters (based on non-policy considerations), they will also be more hostile to franchise expansion when inequality is higher.

**The Cost of Excluding Voters.** The choice of the franchise will also depend on the level

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<sup>8</sup>An alternative (also costly) solution for Conservatives is to reframe the electoral space around a new dimension, e.g. trade or religion.

of repression needed to exclude a section of the electorate. Repression or exclusion costs range from additional (police) spending on monitoring and repressing the opposition to the losses that may come from lack of citizen compliance (through tax evasion, military desertion, and so on). Because excluding potential electors entails imposing some economic and financial costs on enfranchised voters, the latter will be more likely to punish incumbent legislators when repression costs rise (also a non-policy consideration in their vote choice).<sup>9</sup> This leads to a third hypothesis or implication:

*H3.* All else equal, legislators will be more amenable to expanding the franchise when and where the costs of repression are higher, even if they do not expect franchise expansion to increase their vote share.

**Wealth Effects.** The franchise preferences of legislators are also likely to be affected by their individual economic interests and status. As discussed in the democratization literature (Moore, 1966; Boix, 2003; Ansell and Samuels, 2014), holders of considerable fixed wealth, which is easier to tax than liquid and non-specific assets, should be more reluctant to accept democracy.

*H4.* Because franchise expansion is likely to shift policy leftwards to some degree in the medium to long run (even if, as discussed above, candidates are constrained in their positions in the short term), politicians' opposition to franchise expansion will rise with their wealth. Additionally, landholding legislators—whose assets are easier to tax—will be more likely to oppose franchise expansion than legislators with wealth primarily derived from trading or financial interests.

### 3 Estimating MPs' Franchise Preferences

To explain why certain members of the British elite acquiesced to franchise expansion at particular moments, we use parliamentary votes on franchise reform and rely on ideal point esti-

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<sup>9</sup>As discussed in more detail in Section 6, where we leverage the shock of World War I to identify their impact on franchise reform, repression costs depend on both the (technological) capacity of elites to exclude citizens from voting and the organizational capacity of non-enfranchised individuals.

mation to determine each legislator’s latent preferences over the percentage of adult men to be enfranchised.<sup>10</sup> We restrict attention to legislators who represented seats in England and Wales in the House of Commons between 1830 and 1918, as we do not have data on constituency characteristics in Ireland and Scotland.

A large body of work has used ideal point estimation to study long-run trends in elite preferences and behavior (e.g. McCarty et al. 2016 on polarization in America). To do so, they generally assume that the interpretation of these ideal point estimates does not change over time (i.e. a legislator with an ideal point of 1 in the year 2000 is twice as extreme as a legislator with an ideal point of 0.5 in 1950). Yet, ideal point estimates from different eras may not be directly comparable under two circumstances: when legislator behavior is influenced by partisanship and the extent of policy disagreement between parties on an issue changes over time; and when the content of the legislative agenda changes substantially over time.

Since neither of these concerns is entirely resolved by standard fixes, we build upon the procedure proposed by Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017), who suggest two additional steps to improve our ability to compare ideal point estimates from different periods: first, restricting attention to roll call votes in a specific policy domain, and second, using information on the policy content of a subset of key votes to infer the behavior of legislators on votes that occurred when they were not serving. This second step effectively increases the number of “bridging” legislators substantially, improving our ability to compare legislators who do not serve in the same, or neighboring, parliaments.<sup>11</sup>

To apply this procedure to our case, we restrict attention to votes on bills and motions between 1830 and 1918 that dealt with franchise reform. Building on the data set compiled by

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<sup>10</sup>Earlier studies (Rosenthal and Voeten, 2004; Spirling and McLean, 2007) have raised concerns about the validity and interpretation of ideal point estimates in parliamentary, especially Westminster, systems. In page 20 below and in Appendix B.2, we discuss evidence indicating that our estimated ideal points do measure meaningful differences in legislators’ franchise preferences, and also suggest why these concerns may have been less significant in our case.

<sup>11</sup>In Model (2) in Table C.4 in Appendix C.4, we demonstrate that imputation does not affect the relative ranking of legislators who served in the same parliament, as once we include parliament fixed effects, we observe a similar relationship between legislators’ franchise preferences and other covariates regardless of whether these preferences are estimated with imputation.

Eggers and Spirling (2014a), we identify 300 such votes in this period.<sup>12</sup> From these votes, we select 34 votes for imputation. These are votes where the choices of MPs were plausibly non-strategic (e.g. final or take-or-leave-it votes), and where the franchise implied by a successful vote was relatively straightforward to calculate. To calculate the approximate percentage of men that would be enfranchised if a particular vote was successful, we combine historical census data, information from relevant parliamentary debates in Hansard and historical commentary on the implications of each vote (Seymour, 1915; Saunders, 2011).<sup>13</sup>

Our approach assumes that legislators have preferences over differing franchises and that their voting decisions on these votes reflect their underlying preferences on the issue. For each vote, we assume that the cutpoint dividing Yea and Nay votes is located at the midpoint between the proposal (i.e. proportion of individuals enfranchised by the vote) and the status quo (current franchise). That is, legislators voting Yea prefer some franchise above the cutpoint, and legislators voting Nay prefer some franchise below the cutpoint. For instance, consider the parliamentary vote on a Chartist petition to introduce universal male suffrage on 12 July 1839, on which 46 legislators voted Yea and 235 legislators Nay. By our calculations, the male franchise at that time was 19.4%.<sup>14</sup> Assuming that a preference for universal male suffrage implied a preferred franchise of 99%, we infer that the cutpoint dividing Yeas and Nays on this vote was 59.2%.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, those supporting this motion ideally preferred a franchise greater than 59.2%, whereas those opposing it ideally preferred a franchise of less than 59.2%. We then apply these assumptions to reconstruct the hypothetical voting behavior of those legislators (for whom we have information about their behavior in 1839) in other parliamentary divisions

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<sup>12</sup>Roll call votes are, in British legislative parlance, parliamentary divisions. The Eggers and Spirling database includes divisions between 1836 and 1910. We extended its coverage to the period 1830-1836 and 1910-1918 by identifying and adding relevant divisions from Hansard.

<sup>13</sup>We were also able to corroborate our calculations regarding the proportion enfranchised by each successful vote against information on the proportion of adult men registered to vote in England and Wales after that vote, as recorded in parliamentary papers and by Southall and Aucott (2009) in the Vision of Britain database. For more information on our calculations, see Appendix A.2.

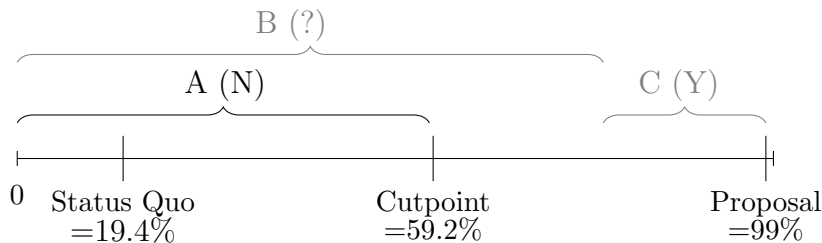
<sup>14</sup>This is slightly higher than the approximate legal franchise following the 1832 Reform Act, which, by our calculations, enfranchised about 17.4% of adult men. This increase reflects differential population growth and wage trends between classes, both of which affected the reach of the 1832 reform relative to the population as a whole. For more information on how we calculate the prevailing status quo franchise, see Appendix A.2.

<sup>15</sup>We assume these votes implied a male franchise of 99% to accommodate any remaining plural vote based on either property and/or residence. Results are identical if we assume an implied franchise of 100% instead.

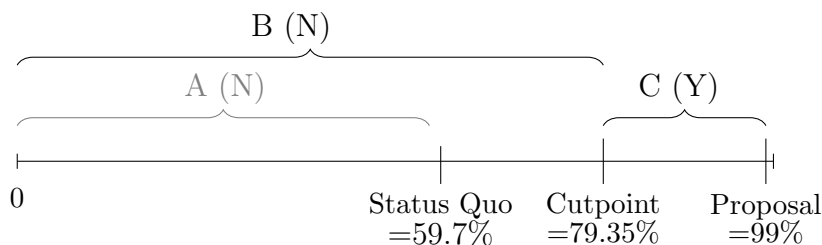
taking place in legislatures in which they were not present.

Figure 1: Illustrative Example

**Chartist Petition of 1839**



**March 1909 Motion**



The logic of this procedure is illustrated in Figure 1, which plots the status quo, proposal and cutpoint for votes on two proposals to introduce universal male suffrage: the Chartist petition of 1839 and the Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill in March 1909. The upper plot displays the status quo (following electoral reform in 1832) and the implied franchise had the Chartist petition of 1839 prospered. Assuming symmetrically distributed preferences, the cutpoint dividing Yea and Nay votes would be 59.2 percent. The lower plot presents the status quo (following the third electoral reform of 1884) and the franchise implied by the motion in 1909. In this case, the cutpoint dividing the chamber would have been 79.35 percent. Figure 1 also plots the approximate ideal points (unknown to us) of three legislators *A*, *B* and *C* in the policy space. Legislator *A* voted against the petition of 1839. In turn, legislator *B* and *C* voted against and in favor of the 1909 motion respectively. *A*'s ideal point is to the left of the 1839 cutpoint and, therefore, to the left of the 1909 cutpoint as well: we can then assume that, had *A* been present in 1909, he would have voted against it too. *C*'s ideal point lies to the right of the 1909 cutpoint and, therefore, to the right of the 1839 cutpoint: had he been

present in 1839, he would have voted in favor. Thus, we can deploy this logic to extrapolate the behavior of MPs in different legislatures – and making the latter comparable within the same policy frame. Notice that, by contrast, we cannot infer  $B$ 's vote in 1839: although his Nay vote places him to the left of the 1909 cutpoint, we do not know whether he voted against as a moderate (with an ideal point between the two cutpoints) or as a reactionary with preferences similar to  $A$ .

We extend this logic to all the proposals we examine. For each key vote, we calculate the cutpoint dividing Yeas and Nays that is jointly implied by the proposal and the prevailing status quo. For votes which proposed franchise expansion, we infer that legislators who voted Yea to these votes would support all votes with cutpoints below the cutpoint of the vote under consideration. Meanwhile, legislators voting Nay would also oppose all measures with cutpoints above that of the vote under consideration. For votes on proposals to maintain or *reduce* the franchise, we infer that legislators voting Yea (to reduce) would oppose franchise expansion measures with higher cutpoints, and support franchise reduction measures with higher cutpoints.<sup>16</sup> However, legislators voting Nay (on reducing the franchise) would support franchise expansion and oppose franchise reduction measures with lower cutpoints. In Appendix A.1, we list the 34 votes selected for the imputation procedure for the male franchise, the relevant status quo, the franchise(s) that would result if the vote was successful, and the inferred cutpoint.

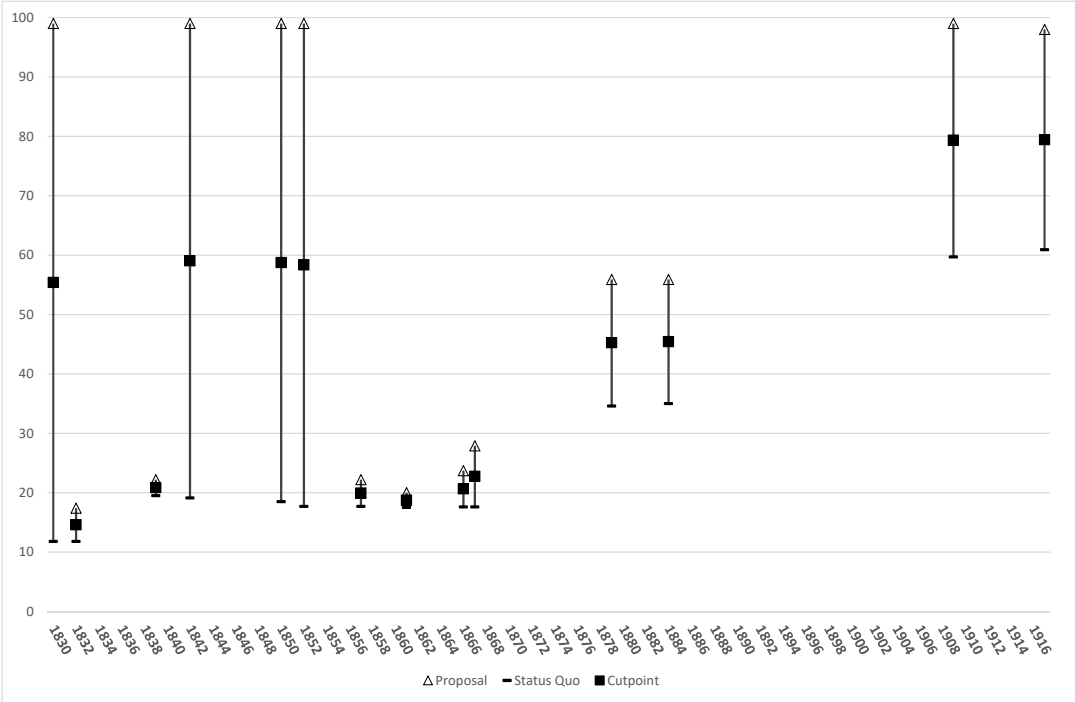
Figure 2 plots some of the votes employed to impute the votes of legislators: the horizontal axis indicates the year in which the vote took place; the vertical axis displays the franchise. For each proposal we draw the status quo in place, the intended franchise of the proposal, and the cutpoint. The purpose of Figure 2 is to show that we have a wide variety of proposals in terms of the vote range they represent: this allows us to map the distribution of legislators with a relatively high level of detail.

Following Bateman et al. (2017), our estimation strategy assumes that legislator ideal

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<sup>16</sup>Of the 34 votes we use for imputation, only one implied a reduction in the agreed franchise – specifically, a June 1917 vote to incorporate an ownership vote into the 1918 Representation of the People Act.

Figure 2: Expected Cutpoint Locations for Selected Male Franchise Reform Proposals



points are fixed over time, with changes in the estimated distribution of preferences driven by replacement rather than changes in individual preferences.<sup>17</sup> Also following Bateman et al. (2017), we use a Bayesian item response theory (IRT) model to estimate legislator ideal points. Finally, we do not impute votes (i) for the small number of legislators whose voting behavior on key votes for that franchise was clearly inconsistent with the logic outlined above, (ii) legislators who were present for only one key vote, or (iii) for key votes taking place in a parliament in which a legislator actually served but did not vote (because he may have chosen to abstain deliberately). However, in all cases, we do still estimate their ideal points on the basis of their actual votes.<sup>18</sup>

Our procedure improves on the one introduced by Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017) in two respects. First, acknowledging that they “have no information about the actual distances” between the status quo and the proposals being voted and employed to assess the policy location of legislators, Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017) rely on the “conventional understanding of the content being voted upon” as described by existing research in political science and history. By contrast, we reconstruct the distribution of ideal votes by establishing the size of the electorate under each proposal we study. That gives us a non-arbitrary and relatively precise method to locate ideal points in a policy space that could range from complete disenfranchisement to universal suffrage. Second, we argue that two legislators with the same preferred franchise but serving in different eras may not support the same proposal if advanced at different times—specifically, before and after a shift in the status quo franchise. This is because a moderate legislator may support a radical franchise proposal under a very conservative status quo, but the same legislator may prefer a moderate status quo to that radical franchise proposal.

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<sup>17</sup>As we also discuss in footnote 19, this does not mean that individual legislators did not change their ‘true’ franchise preferences in response to events or strategic considerations. Rather, the estimates we recover are best interpreted as legislators’ average *revealed* preferences over franchise preferences based on their voting behaviour on franchise-related divisions over their entire career.

<sup>18</sup>Of the 4,077 legislators whose decisions we analyze, only 217 legislators – 5.3% of the total – voted inconsistently on at least one of these key votes. We do not impute the behavior of these legislators on votes where they were not present in order to avoid contrary imputations, but also because these are legislators for whom the proximity voting assumption is arguably inappropriate.

Our ideal point estimator produces an estimated midpoint for each division and an estimated ideal point for each legislator, both on a scale with mean 0 and standard deviation 1. To aid interpretation, we generate predicted values of the franchise preferred by each legislator (on a 0–100% scale) given their estimated ideal point and the relationship between division locations (midpoints) and cutpoints implied by the estimates. For each division, the estimated midpoint is the location of a hypothetical legislator who would be indifferent between voting Yea and Nay, and so corresponds to the theoretical cutpoint (on a scale from 0–100% men enfranchised) dividing Yea and Nay votes that we have calculated for each division (based on our knowledge of the status quo and the proposed franchise).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, by using a generalized additive model (GAM) to regress the cutpoint of each key vote on its estimated midpoint, we can generate a mapping from legislators’ estimated ideal points to their franchise preferences.<sup>20</sup> Using this mapping, we thus generate predicted values for each MP’s preferred male franchise (on a 0–100% scale) given their estimated ideal points (on a different scale).

In Appendix B.1, we present evidence that the procedure with imputation produces significantly more plausible long-term trends in legislator franchise preferences. In particular, we show that a ‘naive’ approach generates a distribution of MP franchise preferences for each parliament that hardly changes over the course of a century, while our approach produces patterns in line with expected historical trends—with the parliamentary median drifting leftwards over time.

One might be concerned that a number of the franchise-related divisions we include in our analysis contained clauses regarding other aspects of electoral reform, such as boundary changes or measures to combat electoral fraud, and these inclusions were undoubtedly important for

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<sup>19</sup>As assumed in all applications of ideal point estimation techniques, this rests on the assumption that legislator choices on these divisions follow a ‘spatial voting’ logic, with their decisions reflecting their underlying franchise preferences. However, as argued by McCarty (2016), this does not amount to assuming that legislators vote entirely based on sincerely held ideological views. Rather, the ideal points that we recover are best interpreted as legislators’ average revealed preferences over franchise expansion over their entire career, and may partly reflect strategic considerations faced by the legislators during their careers—for instance, based on their party or constituency characteristics. We only require that legislators are ‘proximity voters’ who, throughout their career, vote ‘as if’ there is some franchise they consistently prefer. As discussed in footnote 18, we find that, in key votes, almost all legislators voted in a way consistent with this logic.

<sup>20</sup>We use a GAM to estimate this relationship, as the relationship between the estimated midpoints and the assumed cutpoints appears nonlinear.

some legislators' decisions. On occasion, these clauses were included precisely because they would affect the decisions of pivotal legislators, thus helping franchise-related legislation over the line.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, one may worry that the franchise preferences we infer for MPs reflect their preferences on these other issues rather than on the franchise per se.

However, this does not appear to be a significant concern in our case for several reasons. Most importantly, these non-franchise-related clauses were largely absent from our key votes, which we selected in part because they dealt primarily with the size of the male franchise, rather than other issues. Consistent with this, legislators appear to have voted, at least on key votes, 'as if' there was some franchise they consistently preferred – as discussed in footnote 18, only 5.3% of the legislators whose decisions we analyze voted in a way inconsistent with this logic. Note that our procedure weights these key votes much more heavily than other votes in deriving MPs' franchise preferences. Moreover, our estimated ideal points—which take into account legislator behavior on both key *and* non-key votes—predict legislator decisions on key votes very well (ref. Figure B.4 in Appendix B.2), and they are predictably correlated with constituency and personal characteristics.<sup>22</sup>

Previous studies have also raised concerns regarding the validity and interpretation of ideal point estimates in parliamentary settings, and especially in Westminster systems, noting that ideal point estimation techniques frequently do not recover 'correct' legislator positions when applied to such systems—often locating rebellious members of the governing party nearer the main opposition than the bulk of their co-partisans (e.g. Spirling and McLean (2007)). These results have led to the suggestion that, due to higher levels of party discipline in parliamentary systems (Rosenthal and Voeten, 2004) as well as the prevalence of government-versus-opposition voting in Westminster systems (Dewan and Spirling, 2011), ideal point estimates are better interpreted as measures of party loyalty than ideology. However, in Appendix B.2, we report five types of evidence that indicate that our estimated ideal points are a reliable and meaningful measure of legislators' franchise preferences, and that the latter are not just explained by party

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<sup>21</sup>Later, in Section 5.4, we discuss how the inclusion of various clauses, such as commitments to redistricting, were important for the timing and passage of the second and third reforms in particular.

<sup>22</sup>We are able to predict how MPs voted on key votes correctly 89.2% of the time.

affiliation or loyalty.

These five pieces of evidence are: (i) we systematically observe considerable intra-party heterogeneity in legislators' estimated ideal points; (ii) our estimated ideal points remain strong predictors of legislators' decisions on key votes even after we control for party affiliation and propensity to rebel, including in the early twentieth century; (iii) we estimate party leaders as being moderate rather than extreme within their parties, and estimate known advocates of universal suffrage as preferring a male franchise close to 100%; (iv) inspecting MP decisions on key franchise votes, we find that most legislator behavior was consistent with proximity voting and an individual ideal point which is stable over time; (v) the estimates we recover are correlated with constituency and personal characteristics in a predictable way.

In Appendix B.2, we also discuss three possible reasons why the aforementioned concerns regarding ideal point estimation in parliamentary systems have proved less significant in our case. First, although party cohesion in the nineteenth-century House of Commons was undoubtedly high, both parties faced sizeable rebellions from legislators throughout, especially on votes dealing with franchise reform, and even on key votes. Second, on many franchise-related divisions, we find that rebels voted against the leadership of *both* major parties, rather than with the leadership of the opposing party. Finally, our consideration of votes from parliaments spanning over a century, as well as our imputation procedure, may have mitigated the impact of party strategic considerations on our estimates.

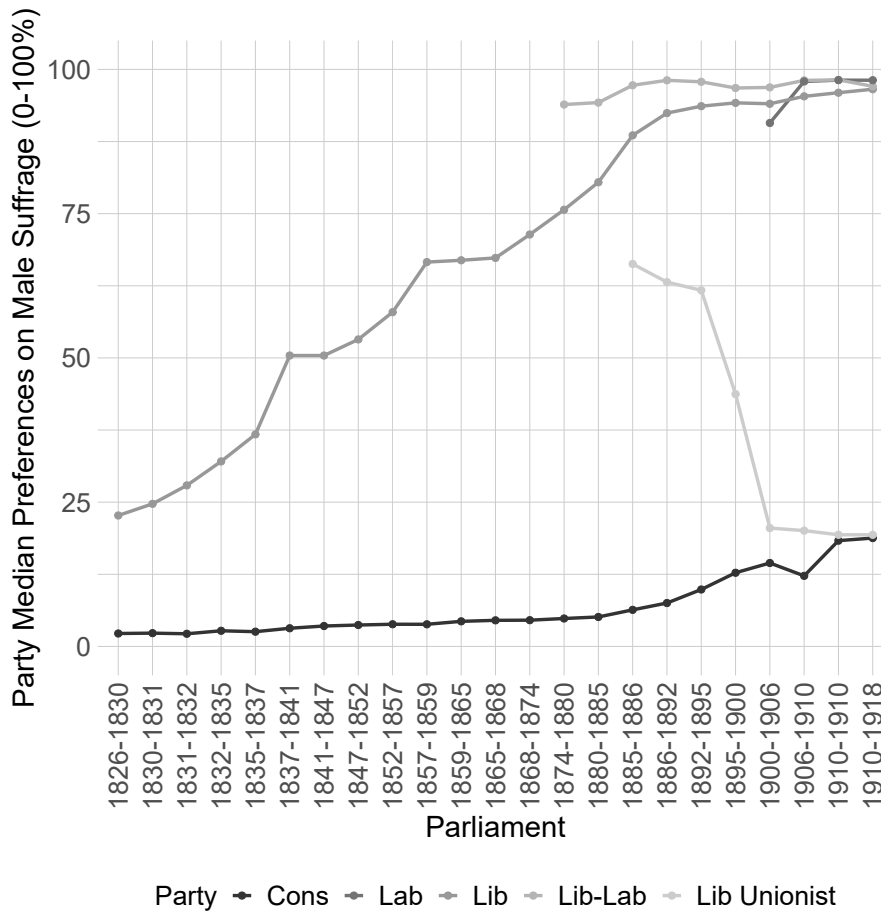
## 4 Parties and Franchise Preferences

We start exploring the distribution of franchise preferences and its determinants by plotting the estimated ideal franchise of the median parliamentarian in our data for the main partisan groups in the House of Commons in Figure 3.<sup>23</sup> In line with our theoretical expectations, Conservatives maintained very restrictive views on the franchise systematically. Liberals defended more progressive positions even in the 1830s, with their median position trending upwards

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<sup>23</sup>We obtained data on MPs' party affiliations from the dataset compiled by Eggers and Spirling (2014a), and, for MPs serving in parliaments before 1832, from Aidt and Jensen (2014).

Figure 3: Party Median Preferences on Male Suffrage



throughout. After the Liberal Unionists split away from the Liberals over Irish Home Rule, the Liberal median’s preferred franchise crossed 90 percent. By 1900, Liberal Unionists had aligned themselves with Conservative positions—a result of either ideological similarities or party discipline. Figure 3 also shows that, predictably, Lib-Lab and Labour MPs were the most favorable towards universal suffrage. As a result of both the Liberals’ growing progressivism and the emergence of radical parliamentarians to their left, overall polarization rose over time. For Liberals and Conservatives, the difference between party medians widened from about 50 percentage points in the late 1840s to more than 80 percentage points in the 1890s. Change only occurred under World War I—something we explore in more detail later on.

Figure 4 zooms in on the preferences of the two main parties. It plots the median (plus 25th

and 75th percentiles and outliers) of Liberal and Conservative MPs in our data separately. The width of bars are proportional to the number of seats controlled by each party following each election. The Liberal median favored a franchise at least twice as large as the one passed in 1832 throughout the following two decades. Having shifted to over 60 percent in the 1850s and, gradually moving to the left afterwards, it reached 80 percent by the time of the third reform of 1884. By 1906, the Liberal median was close to universal male suffrage. The Liberal Party also became more cohesive on this issue over the course of the century. Around the second electoral reform of 1867, the positions of its core (those parliamentarians between the 25th and 75th percentile in the distribution of ideal points) ranged from about 40 percent of men enfranchised to above 80 percent. By 1890, intraparty differences had narrowed to a 10-percent range. In contrast to the Liberals, the Tories hardly changed during most of the nineteenth century, only becoming more progressive in the final parliaments preceding the fourth electoral reform. During this same period, the Conservative Party apparently became more diverse: it was only after 1906 that the position of the Conservative MP in the 75th percentile of the party distribution crossed the legal status quo of 1867—although we qualify this finding in Section 6.

## 5 Why Did Some MPs Like Democracy?

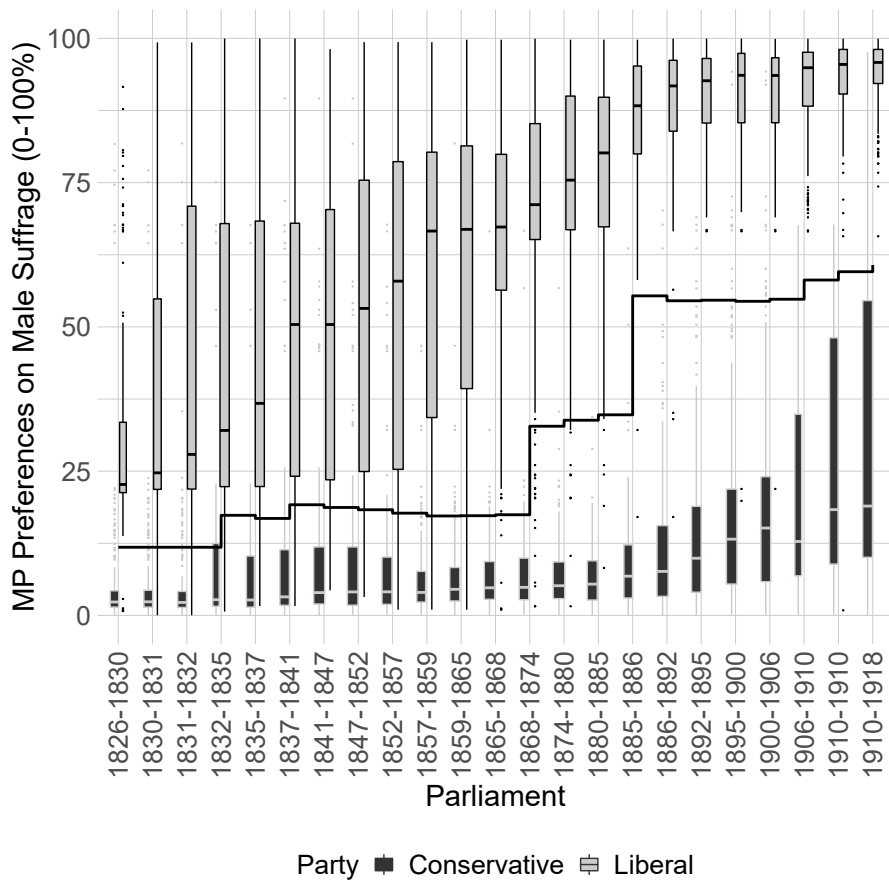
### 5.1 Estimation Strategy

We examine the personal, partisan, social and economic covariates of the preferences of English and Welsh MPs regarding democracy as well as their transformation over the course of a century using the following model, which we estimate by OLS:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 L_{i,t} + \beta_2 C_{i,t} + \beta_3 R_{i,t} + \beta_4 X_{i,t} + \beta_5 Z_{i,t} + \delta_t + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

The dependent variable  $Y_{i,t}$  is the average preferred franchise of the MPs who were elected to represent constituency  $i$  at time  $t$ , as calculated in Section 3.

Figure 4: Major Party Preferences on Male Suffrage



The independent variables  $L_{i,t}$ ,  $C_{i,t}$  and  $R_{i,t}$  denote the proportion of MPs representing constituency  $i$  at time  $t$  who are Liberal, Conservative or Radical respectively.<sup>24</sup> The term  $X_{i,t}$  denotes a battery of social or economic covariates of interest for constituency  $i$  at time  $t$ .  $Z_{i,t}$  represents a vector of control variables, mainly personal attributes of the members of parliament in each constituency. We discuss all these variables shortly. The parameter  $\delta_t$  is a parliament fixed effect capturing common shocks affecting all legislators across the country during parliament  $t$ . In the baseline model, we include constituency random effects and, in all models, we cluster errors  $\epsilon_{i,t}$  by constituency.<sup>25</sup>

Per our discussion in Section 2 on legislators’ incentives, Liberal (or Radical) MPs should prefer a broader franchise than Conservatives, as they will expect to receive more support from newly enfranchised voters. Following the same discussion, the economic structure of MPs’ constituencies should also affect legislators’ franchise preferences, with legislators from both parties preferring a narrower franchise when their constituencies have a wider income distribution and, therefore, a more heterogeneous electorate that makes it harder from existing parties to avoid the entry of a third, more radical candidate. We capture this effect using earnings inequality. In addition, we include average earnings (logged) to control for the possibility that a higher mean income could reduce the redistributive demands of new voters and their likelihood to endorse a new party.

We measure average earnings, as well as the dispersion or inequality of earnings, using information on the annual occupational earnings of all employed men. We construct our data on occupational membership by aggregating and matching individual-level census data from 1851, 1861, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 for England and Wales to the corresponding electoral district

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<sup>24</sup>We classify MPs running as Liberal or independent Liberals as “Liberal”, Lib/Labs, Labour and Chartist MPs as “Radical”, and Conservative and Liberal Unionist MPs as “Conservative”.

<sup>25</sup>We do not include constituency fixed effects in our baseline specification, as our data likely exhibits time-varying (and not highly autocorrelated) measurement error in both the independent and dependent variables. This is because our estimates assume that MPs’ franchise preferences are time-invariant and because our intracensal observations of constituency characteristics are interpolated from decadal census observations. At the same time, the true (unobserved) values of the independent and dependent variables are likely highly serially correlated. Under these circumstances, estimates with group fixed effects may exhibit severe downward bias (Angrist and Pischke 2008, 225-226). However, Model (3) in Table 1 includes county fixed effects instead of constituency random effects, allowing us to partly control for unobserved and time-invariant local factors that may be correlated with our regressors. We obtain very similar results to our baseline specification.

for that census-year.<sup>26</sup> The aggregation is done by identifying the HISCO code corresponding to each worker’s occupation (as recorded in the census), and classifying individuals into nine categories based on their HISCO codes:<sup>27</sup> high non-manual occupations (HISCLASS categories 1 and 2, that is, higher managers and higher professionals); middle non-manual occupations (HISCLASS categories 3 and 4, i.e., lower managers and lower professionals); lower clerical and sales personnel (HISCLASS 5); in the industrial and service sectors, medium-skilled manual (HISCLASS categories 6 and 7, i.e. foremen, medium-skilled workers), low-skilled manual workers (HISCLASS 9), and unskilled workers (HISCLASS 11); and, within the agricultural sector, skilled agricultural occupations (HISCLASS 8, i.e. farmers, fishermen), lower-skilled farm workers (HISCLASS 10), and (unskilled) agricultural laborers (HISCLASS 12).

The annual earnings for each occupational category are taken from the time series data reported in Williamson (1982), who includes information for eighteen occupations (for the period of our study) for the years 1827, 1835, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911. Those occupations cover all our occupational categories with the exception of HISCLASS 8, 10 and 11.<sup>28</sup> To calculate the earnings of (medium skilled) farmers (HISCLASS 8), we use the rental value of land as determined by Clark (2002) weighted by the average size of farms reported in Shaw-Taylor (2005). We estimate the annual earnings of low-skilled farm workers (HISCLASS 10) by multiplying farmers’ earnings by the ratio of low-skilled to medium-skilled earnings in non-agrarian occupations.<sup>29</sup> The earnings for unskilled non-agrarian workers (HISCLASS 11) correspond to the wages of domestic servants published in Williamson (1980). After calculating real earnings using the cost of living series reported by Crafts and Mills (1994), we construct a yearly earnings series by interpolation. Finally, we measure earnings dispersion

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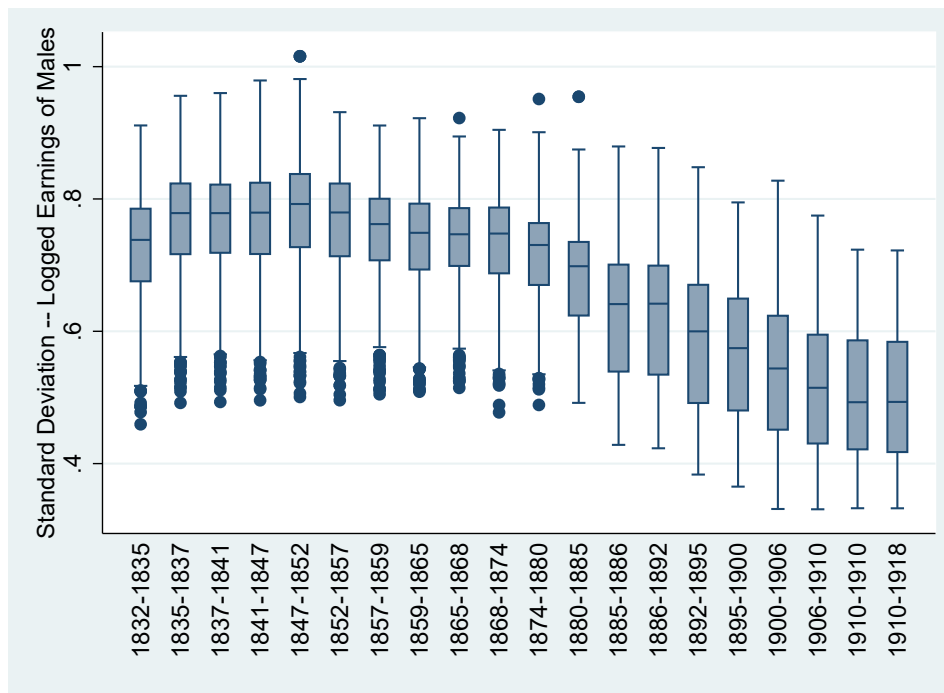
<sup>26</sup>Individual-level census data was obtained from the Integrated Census Microdata (ICeM) project, and parish and constituency boundaries from the Vision of Britain database compiled by Southall and Aucott (2009). We discuss our matching of census and electoral data in Appendix A.3.

<sup>27</sup>We employ Van Leeuwen and Maas (2011) and their HISCLASS classification in what follows.

<sup>28</sup>Appendix A.4 maps out the correspondence between Williamson’s general occupational categories and our HISCLASS classification, lists the specific occupations Williamson employed to calculate the earnings in each of his general categories, and discusses the procedure to weight each specific occupations’ wages to construct the earnings of each HISCLASS group.

<sup>29</sup>This calculation assumes that the percentage earnings differential between low and medium skilled workers is the same in agrarian and non-agrarian occupations.

Figure 5: Box Plot of Earnings Dispersion by Parliamentary Term



Note: This figure plots the median and quartile values for the standard deviation of logged real male earnings across constituencies for each parliamentary period. In line with existing research (Kuznets, 1955; Williamson, 1985), the graph shows that, in the median constituency, earnings inequality peaked in the middle of nineteenth century (to the equivalent of a standard deviation of £160) and then gradually diminished until World War One (to about £100). Despite that decline, differences in the level of earnings inequality, as marked by the entire vertical line, continued to be high across electoral constituencies.

or inequality through the standard deviation of (logged) annual occupational earnings of all employed men. Because data on within-occupational earnings dispersion is extremely limited, our earnings data consists of average earnings for each occupational group. Nonetheless, our dispersion measure arguably tracks well the evolution of earnings inequality throughout the nineteenth century. According to estimations by Williamson (1980), the convergence in pay among occupations accounted for three fourths of the overall trend in the earnings distribution from 1827 and 1851 and for “all of the leveling in both economy-wide and non-agricultural earnings in inequality” [underlined in the original] after 1851 (p. 471).

Figure 5 plots the median and quartile values for the standard deviation of logged real male earnings across constituencies for each parliamentary period. In line with existing research (Kuznets, 1955; Williamson, 1985), we find that, in the median constituency, earnings

inequality peaked in the mid-nineteenth century and then gradually diminished until World War One. Despite that decline, differences in earnings inequality continued to be high across constituencies.

We capture the effect of wealth type and, more specifically, the presence of landed interests, through the proportion of adult men working in agriculture (measured as the sum of the occupational categories HISCLASS 8, 10 and 12). In addition, we include three personal attributes of parliamentarians: the proportion of MPs who held office at the time of the election, the fraction who were eligible for a peerage, and the fraction who were landowners.<sup>30</sup> We expect that MPs who were office-holders, landowners, or eligible for a peerage would be less supportive of franchise expansion. Finally, we control for log population density, the number of non-Anglican pastors per 1000 individuals in each constituency, whether an election was a by-election, and the number of seats in the constituency.

## 5.2 Main Results

In the first instance, we estimate four separate specifications. The results are reported in Table 1. Model (1) estimates the baseline model with constituency random effects and parliament fixed effects. Model (2) introduces party-specific parliament fixed effects to control for the possibility that time-varying factors (e.g. changes in party leadership) may lead parties to have different time trends in franchise preferences. Model (3) includes administrative county fixed effects instead of constituency random effects, allowing us to partly control for unobserved and time-invariant local factors that may be correlated with our regressors—for instance, characteristics of local party organizations or elites. Finally, Model (4) re-estimates the baseline model without parliament fixed effects, mainly to explore the effects of long-term structural trends—like declining earnings inequality from the mid-nineteenth century onwards—on legislators’

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<sup>30</sup>Information on whether an MP was a landowner or eligible for a peerage was obtained from the Parliamentary Archive of MPs compiled by Michael Rush (Rush, 2013). As now, MPs could not simultaneously sit in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. MPs who acquired a peerage had to either decline the peerage or resign their seats. Thus, the individuals we code as peers were not hereditary peers at the time of their election, but became so at some point in their careers. Information on offices held by MPs comes from Eggers and Spirling (2014a).

franchise preferences.

Table 1: OLS Analysis of the Covariates of MP Franchise Preferences

|                                       | (1)              | (2)              | (3)               | (4)              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Proportion Liberal                    | 31.13<br>(7.55)  | 30.32<br>(7.77)  | 31.24<br>(2.45)   | 29.93<br>(2.28)  |
| Proportion Conservative               | -28.55<br>(2.28) | -5.68<br>(7.81)  | -30.22<br>(2.45)  | -28.90<br>(2.28) |
| Proportion Radical Left               | 33.27<br>(2.59)  | 10.41<br>(3.71)  | 32.49<br>(2.76)   | 32.80<br>(2.63)  |
| Earnings Inequality                   | -43.72<br>(7.55) | -41.85<br>(7.21) | -35.51<br>(10.07) | -64.63<br>(3.66) |
| Log Mean Earnings                     | 7.88<br>(6.37)   | 12.14<br>(5.99)  | 2.657<br>(8.23)   | 23.35<br>(1.90)  |
| Prop. in Agricultural Employment      | 5.28<br>(5.40)   | 4.95<br>(5.12)   | 6.73<br>(6.86)    | 17.37<br>(4.05)  |
| Proportion Landowners                 | -2.35<br>(0.98)  | -2.27<br>(0.93)  | -3.46<br>(1.04)   | -2.82<br>(0.99)  |
| Proportion Peers                      | -2.94<br>(1.04)  | -2.83<br>(1.00)  | -3.09<br>(1.06)   | -2.97<br>(1.06)  |
| Proportion Officeholders              | -2.34<br>(1.19)  | -2.23<br>(1.20)  | -2.54<br>(1.40)   | -2.20<br>(1.20)  |
| Non Anglican Pastors per 1000 Persons | 2.90<br>(1.18)   | 1.83<br>(1.08)   | 1.18<br>(1.35)    | 2.62<br>(1.01)   |
| Log Population Density                | 0.97<br>(0.33)   | 0.89<br>(0.32)   | 1.16<br>(0.41)    | 1.09<br>(0.33)   |
| By Election                           | 0.70<br>(0.69)   | 1.61<br>(0.64)   | -0.00<br>(0.75)   | 0.57<br>(0.71)   |
| Number of Seats                       | -0.56<br>(0.81)  | -0.19<br>(0.73)  | 0.13<br>(0.91)    | -2.58<br>(0.75)  |
| Constituency REs                      | ×                | ×                |                   | ×                |
| County FEs                            |                  |                  | ×                 |                  |
| Parliament FEs                        | ×                |                  | ×                 |                  |
| Party-Parliament FEs                  |                  | ×                |                   |                  |
| Observations                          | 8,204            | 8,204            | 8,204             | 8,204            |
| R <sup>2</sup>                        | 0.752            | 0.769            | 0.758             | 0.746            |

p<0.05; p<0.01; p<0.001

Note: Cell entries present coefficient estimates from OLS models of MPs' preferences over the size of the male franchise. Standard errors are clustered by parliamentary constituency.

It is immediately apparent that, in line with our theoretical expectations, there was a systematic gap in franchise preferences between parties. Across models, we estimate that Liberal MPs favored a significantly larger franchise than Conservative MPs, all else equal. However, even conditional on party affiliation, the level of inequality mattered as well: we consistently estimate a large and statistically significant negative association between earnings

inequality and legislators' preferred male franchise. Based on our baseline estimates (Model 1), all else equal, moving from a relatively equal constituency (at the 90th percentile in our data) to a highly unequal one (at the 10th percentile) was associated with a 14.4 percentage point decrease in MPs' preferred male franchise. When we omit parliament fixed effects in Model (4) — mainly to examine the impact of decreasing earnings inequality from the mid nineteenth century onwards — the estimated effect of earnings inequality on franchise preferences is about 50% larger than in Model (1). All else equal, a similarly large increase in earnings inequality is now associated with a decrease of 21.3 percentage points in MPs' preferred male franchise.

We do not consistently find that legislators were more opposed to franchise expansion in more agrarian constituencies (where landed interests and wealth were likely more dominant), or in constituencies with lower average earnings. These results suggest that, among these three socioeconomic factors, declining earnings inequality from the mid-nineteenth century onward was the most important channel through which changes in the composition of enfranchised electors eased opposition to franchise expansion among legislators.<sup>31</sup>

Consistent with our expectations about the role of fixed wealth, landowning MPs were slightly less supportive of franchise expansion. Legislators' preferred franchise was about 3 percentage points smaller than otherwise. We also find that MPs representing more urban constituencies (with higher population density) favored a slightly larger franchise.

That said, it is plausible that how the socioeconomic characteristics of a constituency affected legislators' franchise preferences differed by party. For this reason, in supplementary analyses reported in Appendix C.1, we re-estimate the specifications included in Table 1 after interacting the variables measuring the level of earnings inequality, average earnings, and the proportion of adult men employed in agriculture, with the proportion of legislators from each party in that constituency. Our results suggest that these variables impacted the franchise preferences of Liberal and Conservative legislators similarly. For example, in the re-estimated

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<sup>31</sup>Note that, as we only estimate a single ideal point for each legislator, the patterns we uncover reflect changes in the legislators who are elected to constituencies with these characteristics, rather than changes over time in the preferences of individual MPs. This means, however, that we are likely underestimating the association between constituency characteristics and MP franchise preferences.

baseline specification (Model 1 in Table C.1), we find that moving from a relatively equal constituency to a highly unequal society is associated with a drop of 9.0 percentage points in the male franchise preferred by Liberal MPs, and a drop of 13.3 percentage points for Conservative MPs.<sup>32</sup>

### 5.3 Supplementary Analyses

In Appendix C.2, we re-estimate Model (1) from Table 1 separately for each of the three electoral regimes. We also, again, explore the possibility that how socioeconomic characteristics influenced legislators' franchise preferences varied between party and electoral regimes, and thus, interact the relevant variables with party. As before, we consistently find that the Liberals favored a much larger franchise than Conservatives. However, the importance of earnings inequality for intra-party variation in franchise preferences differed by electoral regime. Whereas earnings inequality was negatively associated with Liberals' franchise preferences between 1832 and 1885, it was not afterward. In turn, earnings inequality and Conservative preferences were negatively correlated after 1865, but not before. One possible explanation for these patterns—suggested by Figure 4—is that in the first period, the Conservatives were almost completely united against any franchise expansion, while the Liberals in the third period were almost completely united in favor of (close to) universal suffrage. This would leave little room for inequality to affect Conservative franchise preferences in the first period and Liberal franchise preferences in the third period.<sup>33</sup>

In Appendix C.3, we consider whether and how the effect of earnings inequality on franchise preferences might have been driven by the changing class composition of constituencies over the course of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, we re-estimate the models reported in Table 1 after substituting several measures of class composition for earnings inequality and

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<sup>32</sup>We also find that more equal constituencies were more likely to elect Liberal MPs, and more unequal constituencies Conservative MPs (ref. Table C.5 in Appendix C.4).

<sup>33</sup>We also fail to reject the hypotheses that the effect of earnings inequality on franchise preferences was the same in the first and second periods for the Liberals, and in the second and third periods for the Conservatives—and so we cannot reject the possibility that the magnitude of this effect could be independent of the level of inequality or proportion already enfranchised. Results are available on request.

the proportion employed in agriculture (again, including specifications where we interact these variables with party so as to explore party-specific patterns). Our results suggest that, for both parties, the displacement of unskilled agricultural workers by increasing proportions of skilled agricultural workers (for instance, propertied farmers), medium-skilled non-farm workers (principally, craftsmen and foremen) and low-skilled non-farm workers (mainly, the traditional industrial working class) was critical in eroding legislators' opposition to a more inclusive franchise.

Appendix C.4 establishes the robustness of our key findings to models which use raw ideal points (instead of predicted franchise preferences) as the dependent variable as well as in models using ideal points estimated without imputation. These models demonstrate that our results are not spuriously driven by the transformation from ideal point to franchise preferences, or by the imputation procedure. Since imputation chiefly improves our ability to compare legislators that do *not* serve in the same, or neighboring, parliaments, it is intuitive that, once we include parliament fixed effects, we observe a similar relationship between legislators' preferences and their constituency and personal characteristics when these preferences are estimated with and without imputation. Our findings are also robust to controlling for (i) whether Labour fielded a candidate in a constituency, (ii) whether a constituency was a borough or county seat, (iii) the proportion of adult men registered to vote in a constituency, as well as models estimated at the legislator, rather than constituency-election, level (ref. Appendix C.4 for (i); remaining results available on request).

## 5.4 Agenda Setting and Strategic Behavior

The main goal of the paper is to explain the nature and causes of Britain's democratization by measuring the evolution of the positions of parliamentarians toward the franchise. Mapping out their preferences allows us to identify the set of reforms that were feasible, that is, those reforms that, given the underlying preferences of MPs, could result in the formation of a parliamentary majority willing to grant the vote to new electors. On the other hand, there was often no one-to-

one, mechanical relationship between parliamentarians' opinions and parliamentary decisions. The passage of new legislation could be affected by, at least, two factors: the role of agenda setters, who could delay (or speed up) the construction of pro-reform majorities; and, the introduction of other electoral items (such as the distribution of seats or the regulation of campaign finance) to sway parliamentarians in particular directions in the franchise vote.

Here we discuss how, conditional on the distribution of MPs' preferences we have estimated, those two factors likely affected the timing and nature of Britain's electoral reforms. We provide a more detailed analysis of this question in Appendix D. We focus most of our attention to the reform cycle of 1851-67, which included numerous failed initiatives before the passing of the Second Reform Act.

The Role of Agenda Setting. Following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the European revolutionary episodes of 1848, the expansion of the franchise was back on the agenda of most British cabinets during the following two decades. The election of 1852 resulted in a median parliamentarian preferring a slighter larger franchise than the legal one. That difference only grew over time. Moreover, within the Liberal coalition, which controlled the government most of the time, its median parliamentarian favored a franchise more than three times larger than the status quo (see Figure D.1 in Appendix D). However, it took three legislatures to expand the franchise, seemingly for two reasons: the moderating role played by both parties' leaders in control of the legislative agenda, and the distribution of preferences within parties (and, in particular, within the Liberal party).

As expected from the underlying preferences of Conservatives, the plans formulated by Tory leaders in 1854 and 1859 would have resulted in small increases in the franchise (Saunders, 2011, pages 99, 110-112). Until the 1860s, Liberal (here including Whig) proposals were only marginally more expansive. Palmerston, the Liberal leader in the mid 1850s, had an estimated ideal male franchise closer to the Whig faction than the estimated median of the Liberal party. A proposal made in 1852, which would have increase the male franchise by around 2 percentage points (Newmarch, 1857), was thwarted by Radical Liberals (with the cooperation of Conservatives keen on defeating the government). A bill drafted in 1854 by John Russell, at

the time leader of the Commons and himself a moderate Liberal, antagonized Palmerston as well as other Whig members of the government, fizzling soon afterward. Palmerston's reform pledge in May 1857, which offered a timid expansion of suffrage, died with the collapse of the Liberal government a few months later (Saunders, 2011, pp. 104-105).

More generous proposals depended on the goodwill of Whig MPs, who remained the pivotal parliamentarians until the middle of the 1860s. The Liberal government decided to withdraw the bill of 1860, which would have enlarged male suffrage by several percentage points, on the opposition of moderate Liberals (Saunders, 2011, p. 128). Real reform only became possible after the number of Whig parliamentarians shrank and the Liberal party developed more cohesive and progressive preferences over the suffrage question.

Strategic Bundling. In the 1860s, Liberals moved to the left on franchise reform. In the Parliament of 1852-57, the Liberal MPs in the 25th percentile of the Liberal party distribution supported giving the right to vote to about 25 percent of men. By 1865, an equally placed Liberal MP supported enfranchising close to 60 percent of men (Figure 4). The franchise preferred by the Liberal leader doubled after the 1865 election (and the death of Palmerston) to about 45 percent of men (Figure D.1). Unsurprisingly, Gladstone introduced a bill proposing a broader franchise in March 1866. 'Adullamite' MPs, a collection of Whigs and moderate Liberals that still held a shrinking but pivotal position in the House of Commons, expressed immediate dismay at the possibility of enfranchising "working-class" voters to the point of jeopardizing "the very existence of the 'moderate liberal majority' " (Saunders, 2011, p.203).

Linking the extension of the franchise to the final process of redistricting would prove critical to pass any electoral reform. To support the Gladstone's bill, Adullamite MPs demanded assurances from the government that it would protect their reelection chances (mostly tied to the preservation of small boroughs). Already in late March 1866, Gladstone committed in public to tackle the problem of seat redistribution accordingly. But he insisted that "the franchise must be settled first" (Saunders, 2011, p.211). Mistrusting the strength of Gladstone's promises, Adullamites split away from the government. By early April, the government majority in parliamentary votes fell to only five votes. Two months later, a key amendment

supporting the bill was rejected by the narrowest of margins, leading to the collapse of the Liberal government. Derby formed a new Conservative government with the support of dissident Liberals.

Worrying that the continuous growth of urban Britain and of a more progressive Liberal party could soon lead to a permanent Tory minority, Disraeli, Derby's Chancellor, pushed for a Second Reform Bill—to be crafted on the most favorable terms to their electoral interests. In the franchise question, Disraeli accepted the terms of the Gladstone reform and an even more expansive amendment put forward Hodgkinson, a Radical MP. In contrast to Gladstone, however, Disraeli tied the suffrage expansion and redistribution plans together. And he did in a credible manner—mainly because he obtained Gladstone's public promise that Liberals would not oppose redistricting in exchange for franchise expansion. Gladstone's commitment cleared the path to a final approval of the bill without a parliamentary "division", i.e., vote.<sup>34</sup>

Franchise reform and redistricting were also bundled together at some point during the discussion of the Third Electoral Reform of 1884. But their joint consideration responded to a different political and institutional logic than the 1867 deal. The latter was required to supersede the opposition of both Whig and Conservative MPs in the Commons. By contrast, the 1884 deal was struck to sway the House of Lords. When Conservative MPs asked for the "redistribution of electoral power" (Seymour, 1915, p.469), that is, redistricting, to support Gladstone's bill in the spring of 1884, Gladstone, riding on a strong Liberal majority, refused to negotiate any encompassing agreement that would include redistricting. It was only in the fall of 1884 that Gladstone eventually agreed to implement some redistribution scheme (to be worked out in the future and that resulted in the Redistribution bill of 1885, approved after the franchise extension) to overcome a veto from the House of Lords.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Even before the third reading of the bill—which occurred without a vote—several components of the reform were agreed without a vote in the Commons (for instance, the Hodgkinson amendment). Thus, we cannot determine how popular these elements were with rank-and file MPs from each party. Notice, however, that votes on franchise-related divisions between 1866 and 1867 were mostly party-line, with rank-and-file Conservative MPs typically continuing to vote almost unanimously against, and Liberal MPs almost unanimously for, further expansion of the male franchise. This also holds for key votes in our analysis in the the period leading up to the reform (1861-1867). See Appendix D for details.

<sup>35</sup>As Seymour (1915) writes, "Failing in the Commons, the Conservatives trusted to the Lords, who justified such confidence by refusing to pass the measure without sufficient guarantee of an immediate Redistribution

## 6 The Effect of World War I on MP Preferences

As pointed out in Section 2, when choosing the size of the franchise, political elites are likely to take into account, in addition to the electoral calculations described in Section 5, the costs of exclusion incurred to maintain a restrictive franchise. As these costs increase, political elites should have a stronger incentive to expand the franchise.

The impact of the costs of exclusion on democratization is generally difficult to measure and identify because they depend on variables—the (technological) capacity of elites to exclude citizens from the ballot box and the organizational capacity of non-enfranchised voters—that are often endogenous to the forces of social and economic development that affect directly income and wealth, and, therefore, the electoral incentives of legislators. For example, low-income individuals generally have fewer organizational resources than middle-class individuals. Well-functioning states have the bureaucratic capacity to both maintain order and protect property rights conducive to growth.

Here, we employ the shock of World War I, which was arguably exogenous to economic development, to measure a direct change in exclusion costs. First, the war of 1914 imposed extraordinary costs on the whole population, raising its political expectations and demands. In contrast to previous military conflicts, such as the Boer wars, which had been fought by a small army composed of professional officers and voluntarily enlisted soldiers, in 1916, two Military Service Acts introduced the compulsory conscription of men between the ages of 18 and 41. The passage of these two laws took place against considerable political opposition. Irish nationalists and a fraction of the Liberal party voted against them. The Asquith government secured the support of trade unions and Labour only after promising to exclude all men employed in industries deemed essential to the war effort (Levi 1997: 51-58, 111-115). Second, compulsory conscription had a particularly strong impact among non-enfranchised men (such as casual

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Bill (...) It was not until the autumn of 1884, when the aroused temper of the masses and the inflexibility of the upper House threatened a crisis, that a compromise was arranged, and the constitutional revolution which took place twenty-seven years later, was avoided. The Conservatives agreed that the bill when reintroduced, should be allowed to pass, but only upon the understanding that a scheme of redistribution should be meanwhile presented. The bases of that scheme were to be arranged by the opposing leaders.” (p.470)

agricultural labor or very unskilled industrial workers) because they had been less likely than enfranchised individuals to enroll in the army while Britain relied on voluntary conscription during the first two years of war. As British historian Jay Winter writes in his overview of the war effort in Britain, in the agricultural sector “particularly high [enrollment] figures were registered among permanent as opposed to casual labor” (Winter 1985: 34). Likewise, in the manufacturing sector, “one of the striking features of the early phase of enlistment was the high rates of recruitment among skilled workers in trades that were not threatened by unemployment” as opposed to those “workers in precarious trades who had little or nothing to lose by joining up” (Winter 1985: 35).<sup>36</sup> Finally, World War I bolstered the organizational capacity of the working class. Trade unions, supported by the British state to create an efficient war machine in the industrial sector, saw their membership double to over 8 million people by 1920.

The vulnerability of political incumbents due to the unpopularity of the war and the growing organizational strength of labor was made apparent by a wave of social unrest across Europe. The Russian Revolution of February 1917 toppled the tsar. In response to German workers’ strikes, the Kaiser promised democratic elections in Prussia after the war in his Easter address. In April, a substantial number of French divisions in the frontline experienced persistent mutinies and a record number of desertions. In May, over 200,000 workers went into 3-week strike in British engineering sector, prompting Lloyd George to declare in parliament that “of all the problems which governments had to handle during the Great War, the most delicate and probably the most perilous were those arising on the home front.”<sup>37</sup> This upsurge of popular discontent arguably shaped the political calculations of British conservatives.<sup>38</sup> In October 1916, shortly after the introduction of compulsory conscription, the government convened a parliamentary conference that eventually issued a report supporting male universal suffrage in

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<sup>36</sup>By April of 1916, that is, before the introduction of universal conscription, the proportion of volunteers over the prewar labor force was 28 percent in manufacturing jobs, below the national average, but above 40 percent among individuals in finance, commerce, and professional occupations (Winter 1985: 34; Table 2.3).

<sup>37</sup>Quoted by Stevenson (2020), p.269.

<sup>38</sup>For a literature that examines the role of diffusion and of the transnational context on the adoption of democratic institutions, see, among others, Boix (2011), Haggard and Kaufman (2016) and Gunitsky (2017).

January 1917. Two months later, the House of Commons started voting on an electoral reform that would culminate in the passage of the Fourth Electoral Reform. The Conservative MPs who had opposed its recommendations ended up voting only against female universal suffrage. On male suffrage, they lobbied, at most, for maintaining the ownership vote, which, at that point, implied distorting the principle of one man, one vote marginally (Morris, 1921).<sup>39</sup>

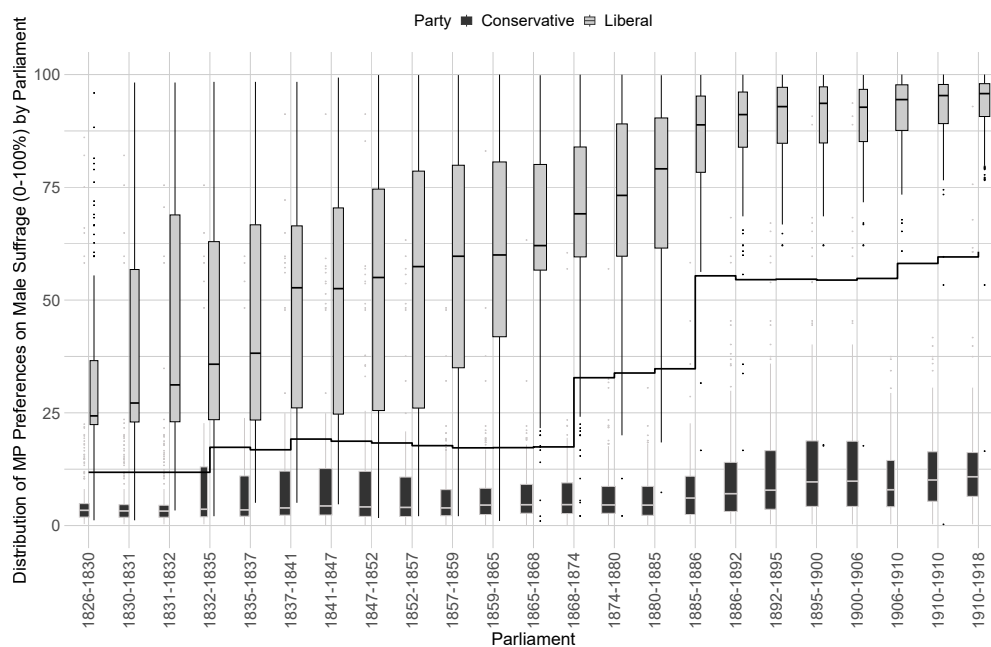
Figure 4 shows that the range of opinions on male suffrage within the Conservative party became more diverse and, on average, more favorable to universal suffrage from 1906 onward. It would seem, therefore, that the election of a sizeable and growing number of Conservative MPs with more progressive views on the franchise had triggered the modernization of Conservatism even before Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914. Notice, however, that it is also possible that their prewar voting records were no more progressive than earlier intakes of Conservative MPs for two reasons. First, our estimation procedure only produces a single ideal point estimate for every MP based on their average voting record on this issue. Second, it may be that Conservative MPs only grew more supportive of a wider male franchise after the war broke out. In Figure 6, we re-estimate MPs' preferences excluding any votes after 1914. This exercise shows that, on the basis of pre-WWI votes, the positions of Conservative MPs did not experience any changes after the elections of 1906 and 1910.

To explore whether newly elected Conservatives were already more progressive before 1914 or whether they changed their position in response to the war experience, we plot two trends in Figure 7. We graph, in black, the marginal effect of MPs estimated ideal points, including 95% confidence intervals, on their vote in favor of franchise extension for all key votes from 1832 onward. We display, in a dashed gray line, the adjusted R-squared from each of these

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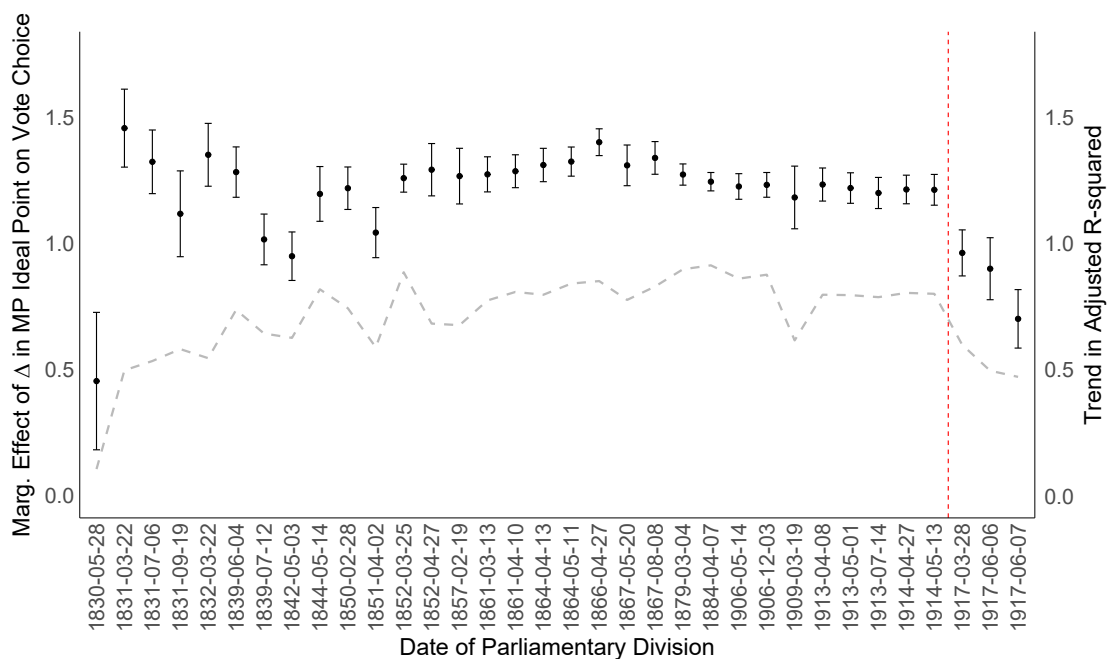
<sup>39</sup>The connection between compulsory conscription and political rights becomes also apparent in light of the Irish question. In response to the Irish demand to establish home rule in exchange for compulsory conscription in Ireland, the Lloyd George government postponed both—arguably because home rule seemed unfeasible in light of Conservatives' opposition. Even after compulsory conscription was legally extended to Ireland in 1918 without any political concessions in exchange, it was never implemented (Adams and Poirier, 1987, p. 230-38). Although our account emphasizes the role of exclusion costs, it is compatible with Scheve and Stasavage (2016), who interpret the introduction of a more progressive taxation system after 1918 as a strategy to compensate for the sacrifices imposed by World War I. Our explanation, however, does not rely on assuming away time inconsistency problems, which arise in their explanation, where compensation happened after the end of the war.

Figure 6: Major Party Preferences on Male Suffrage, exc. WW1 Divisions



Note: This figure plots legislators' predicted franchise preferences estimated after restricting attention to pre-1914 votes.

Figure 7: Trend in Explanatory Power of MP Ideal Points



(univariate) regressions. The dashed vertical line separates key votes that occurred before and after the outbreak of World War I, with the last prewar key vote occurring in June 1914, less than two months before the start of the war. Both trends tell a similar story. MPs' estimated ideal points are a much better predictor of their actual votes on key franchise divisions before August 1914 than they are after. Likewise, the proportion of the variance in MPs' decisions that is explained by their ideal points declines sharply from almost 0.8 in June 1914 to 0.6 in March 1917, and 0.5 in June 1917. This suggests that, when compared with the bulk of their voting records on the franchise issue, MPs' votes on these three 1917 divisions were atypical.<sup>40</sup> In short, our interpretation is that wartime developments nudged a significant chunk of (Conservative) MPs towards embracing a wider male franchise, and as such, helped tip the 1918 Representation of the People Act over the finish line.

## 7 Conclusion

Broadly speaking, there were two main routes to democratization in European politics: a first one, defined by gradual and peaceful expansion of the franchise, backed up by a large subset of the political elite and resulting in competitive elections and the peaceful transfer of power; and, a second, more unstable and divisive, path marked by considerable polarization, sudden regime reversals, and, at times, civil war. Here, we flesh out a theoretical explanation for the first route to democracy, testing it with British parliamentary data over the long nineteenth century that culminated in the passage of male universal suffrage after World War I.

To explain the process of gradual democratization, we assume, in line with the literature of incumbent-led democratization, that political incumbents decided to liberalize the political regime to maximize their likelihood to retain power over time (Riedl et al., 2020). We find

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<sup>40</sup>Examination of roll calls demonstrates that many legislators changed their minds on the question of universal male suffrage between 1909 and 1917. Among English and Welsh Conservative MPs who did not support the electoral reform bill of 1909, 54.5 percent supported the Asquith motion demanding universal male suffrage (with residence qualifications) of March 1917 and 83.3 percent the first clause of the Representation of the People Bill voted in June 1917. Among Conservative MPs that abstained in 1909, support was 21.1 percent and 75.0 percent respectively. The numbers among Conservative MPs first elected after 1910 are very similar, implying that wartime opinion change among existing MPs, rather than election of a more progressive cohort of Conservatives, was critical.

that the decision to democratize took place in a context of intra-elite divisions—driven by the relationship between the electoral consequences of expanding the franchise and the “costs of repression” incurred to maintain the authoritarian status quo (Dahl, 1971; Przeworski, 1991; Weingast, 1997).

Liberal or left-leaning legislators, who were more likely to receive the support of previously non-enfranchised electors, adopted more pro-democratic platforms than Conservative or right-leaning parliamentarians. The degree to which Liberal MPs supported progressive franchise reforms hinged on the extent they they could add new voters while maintaining their traditional electorate. This depended, in turn, on the level of heterogeneity of economic interests. Where income inequality was high, Liberals faced a sharp trade-off under quasi or full universal suffrage. Even though franchise expansion promised to add a large pool of potential Liberal voters, it could also prompt the successful entry by a more radical candidate to their left. The late nineteenth century trend toward economic and social equalization resolved this trade-off in favor of franchise expansion. The same trend also had a democratizing effect on the attitudes of Conservative politicians. Although the average Conservative MP maintained a reactionary position toward the extension of the franchise, a reduction in economic inequality, arguably related to the growth of a broader urban middle and affluent working class, pushed a fraction of the Conservative party to embrace more liberal attitudes. Finally, the decision to democratize was influenced by organizational capacity of non-enfranchised individuals and the repression technologies available to incumbents—as already shown by work on the first electoral reform (Aidt and Franck, 2015) and the Chartist movement (Mather, 1953).

Besides sketching a theoretical framework that integrates existing institutional and sociological accounts of democratization, our paper makes three methodological contributions to the literature on democratic transitions. First, we switch the attention of the democratization literature from broadly-defined social actors (such as the wealthy, the poor, softliners, hardliners, radicals, moderates, etc.) to modeling the (electoral) incentives and behavior of individual political actors, such as legislators, that have the formal authority to determine the rules of the game. Second, instead of relying on highly aggregated data at the country level (see, among a

vast literature, Przeworski (2009), Treisman (2015) and Miller (2016)), we estimate the preferences of policy-makers, that is, the preferences of British parliamentarians during the United Kingdom’s long march to full democracy in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. To that end, we use (and improve) recent models developed to estimate legislators’ ideal points that rely on roll-call behavior as well as actual information about the content of the votes. We then examine the relationship between those preferences and key partisan, economic and social covariates, showing that the attitudes of British parliamentarians responded to the concerns we highlight. Third, we rely on what we believe is a novel strategy to measure the organizational capacity of the unenfranchised: we employ World War I as a plausibly exogenous shock (to the forces of economic development that normally affect exclusion costs) that pushed all MPs to support universal male suffrage.

Our paper hopefully pushes forward two broad research agendas. On the one hand, it provides microfoundations (both in terms of the individual preferences of political actors and of the particular institutional arena through which their decisions were implemented) to the literature that has emphasized the role that economic and social modernization have in fostering democratic transitions and the consolidation of democracy (Boix and Stokes, 2003; Treisman, 2023; Fresh, 2024).

On the other hand, it contributes to a body of research that has explored the political and economic incentives of elites to enfranchise historically excluded groups such as Black Americans, women, and migrants—highlighting the role of incumbents’ electoral calculations, the socioeconomic factors that shape those calculations, as well as the specter of popular mobilization. Teele (2014) shows that, in the British case, electoral calculations prevented the Liberals from committing to universal female suffrage prior to 1918. An important body of research on the political incorporation of Black Americans has pointed to forces similar to those we uncover for Britain: a process of racial realignment within the northern Democratic party raised the latter’s incentives to fight segregation and disenfranchisement across the United States (Schickler, 2016); the mechanization of cotton led to the final breakdown of the system of social and labor control that prevailed in the American South well into the middle of the twentieth cen-

ture and, as a result, to the political incentives of white landowners to maintain it (Alston and Ferrie, 1989; Holley, 2000); and, the effective political mobilization of Blacks in southern states (Kousser, 1971; Mickey, 2015). Recent work has shown narrowing differential educational and skill levels raises the willingness of natives to naturalize immigrants (Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2013), probably due to the declining net redistributive costs of including them (Ferwerda, 2021).

Future work could explore the evidence for our theory of democratization in two directions. First, it could investigate whether politicians are less supportive of enfranchising migrants whenever there is greater economic competition between migrants and natives. We know, for example, that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, migratory policy became restrictive, effectively ending the first globalization era, to protect native unskilled labor and to preempt a widening wage distribution in host countries (O'Rourke and Williamson, 2001; Keyssar, 2009). Second, it could explore the extent to which, historically, legislators were more supportive of expanding the suffrage to women when they had more reason to believe the policy preferences of newly enfranchised women would be more similar to those of their current voters. Last but not least, future researchers could also apply our empirical approach to study long-term trends in legislator preferences in other historical cases and on other issues.

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# Appendices

## A Data

### A.1 Key Votes on Male Suffrage

Table A.1: Information on Key Votes on Male Suffrage

| Date of Vote         | Notes   | Implied Male Franchise (%) |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. 28 May 1830       | Motion demanding universal male suffrage proposed by MP Daniel O' Connell.      | 99                         |
| 2. 22 March 1831     | Second reading of first iteration of the Reform Bill.                           | 15.7                       |
| 3. 6 July 1831       | Second reading of second iteration of the Reform Bill.                          | 15.7                       |
| 4. 19 September 1831 | Third reading of the Reform Bill.   | 17.7                       |
| 5. 22 March 1832     | Third reading of the Reform Bill, after incorporating Lords' amendments.        | 17.4                       |
| 6. 4 June 1839       | Motion proposing to expand the county franchise.                                | 22.2                       |
| 7. 12 July 1839      | Chartist petition demanding universal male suffrage.                            | 99                         |
| 8. 3 May 1842        | Chartist petition demanding universal male suffrage.                            | 99                         |
| 9. 14 May 1844       | Chartist petition demanding universal male suffrage.                            | 99                         |
| 10. 28 February 1850 | Motion demanding universal male suffrage proposed by MP Joseph Hume.            | 99                         |
| 11. 2 April 1851     | Second reading of County Franchise Bill.  | 22.2                       |
| 12. 25 March 1852    | Motion demanding universal male suffrage proposed by MP Joseph Hume.            | 99                         |
| 13. 27 April 1852    | Motion requesting leave to introduce bill to expand the county franchise.       | 22.2                       |
| 14. 19 February 1857 | Motion requesting leave to introduce bill to expand the county franchise.       | 22.2                       |
| 15. 13 March 1861    | Second reading of County Franchise Bill.  | 20                         |
| 16. 10 April 1861    | Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill.                                       | 22.1                       |
| 17. 13 April 1864    | Second reading of County Franchise Bill.  | 20                         |
| 18. 11 May 1864      | Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill.                                       | 22.1                       |
| 19. 27 April 1866    | Second reading of the Representation of the People Bill.                        | 23.7                       |
| 20. 20 May 1867      | Liberal amendment to reduce copyhold franchise to £5. Committee vote.           | 27.9                       |
| 21. 8 August 1867    | Commons vote on Lords' amendment to retain £10 copyhold franchise.              | 33                         |
| 22. 4 March 1879     | Motion to extend borough franchise to counties.                                 | 55.9                       |
| 23. 7 April 1884     | Vote supporting continued debate on the Representation of the People Bill.      | 55.9                       |
| 24. 14 May 1906      | Second reading of Plural Voting Bill.   | 62.7                       |
| 25. 3 December 1906  | Second reading of Plural Voting Bill.   | 62.7                       |
| 26. 19 March 1909    | Second reading of the Representation of the People Bill.                        | 99                         |
| 27. 8 April 1913     | Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill.                                       | 65.5                       |
| 28. 1 May 1913       | Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill.                                       | 65.5                       |
| 29. 14 July 1913     | Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill.                                       | 65.6                       |
| 30. 27 April 1914    | Second reading of Plural Voting Bill  | 65.6                       |
| 31. 13 May 1914      | Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill  | 65.6                       |
| 32. 28 March 1917    | Asquith motion demanding universal male suffrage with residence qualifications. | 99                         |
| 33. 6 June 1917      | Proposal to reintroduce the ownership vote.                                     | 96                         |
| 34. 7 June 1917      | Vote on Clause 1. of the Representation of the People Bill.                     | 98                         |

## A.2 Sources and Methods Employed to Calculate Proportion of Enfranchised Individuals

As we discuss in Section 3, for each key vote, we identified the percentage of men that would have been enfranchised had that particular vote been successful. To do so, we have employed data from the population censuses conducted every ten years and starting in 1831 to calculate the number of individuals men older than 20. For those years where the census was not conducted, we determine the number of adult men by log-linear interpolation.

To determine the number of individuals that would have been (or were eventually) enfranchised in the proposals and votes we examine, we have employed the following sources:

- For those pre-WWI proposals to introduce (male) universal suffrage (May 1830, July 1839 to February 1850, March 1852, March 1909), we estimate the male franchise to reach 99 percent (to accommodate the possibility of some remaining plural vote based on either property and/or residence).
- For the votes of 1831 and 1832, we employ the estimates reported by Seymour (1915).
- For the proposals and votes of April 1851, April 1852 and February 1857, we use the estimates of Newmarch (1857).
- For the proposals from 1861 through 1884 we use the estimates of Seymour (1915). To clarify the exact definition of the amendments to the 1867 reform, we also employ Saunders (2011).
- For the votes of 1906, 1913 and 1914 on the abolition of plural voting, we exclude the number of plural voters (which are thought of as a negative quantity, that is, as “subtracting” from the total number of enfranchised individuals) from the overall number of individuals with the right to vote. The number of plural voters comes from Parliamentary Papers (1907-007504, 1914-016950).
- For the reforms of 1917–18, we rely on the estimates of Morris (1921) as well as the figures provided by British MPs in parliamentary debates, as reported in Hansard (5th series, vol. 94)

To calculate the prevailing status quo at the time of a vote, we use information on the number of adults registered to vote at the time (as recorded in parliamentary papers), divided by the number of adult men above 20 (as recorded in the census) – interpolating values for intracensal years and adjusting for plural voting. For votes at committee stage or on amendments, the prevailing status quo is taken to be the franchise agreed in previous votes on the same bill. Thus, for instance, the relevant status quo for the 8 August 1867 vote opposing one of the Lords amendments to the Representation of the People Act suggested is 32% (the franchise if the amendment was upheld) rather than 17.5% (the approximate legal male franchise following the 1832 reform).

## A.3 Matching Census and Electoral Data

In order to match the census and electoral data, we first aggregate the individual-level census data to the parish level, and match each parish to one or more constituencies. To accommodate those instances where a parish was subdivided between multiple constituencies, we apply standard areal interpolation techniques, using information on the proportion of the area of each parish that falls within each constituency and assuming that individuals are uniformly distributed within each parish in order to aggregate the census data from the parish-level to the constituency-level. Finally, we

use log-linear interpolation to generate constituency-election specific values for each variable from 1851 to 1918, assuming a constant exponential rate of growth for each variable between census years. Individual-level census data is not available for the period before 1851, but parish-level population data for 1831, 1841 and 1851 is available from the Vision of Britain database. Therefore, for the period 1831 to 1851, we generate constituency-election level values by log-linear *extrapolation* at the parish-level, assuming that the proportion of individuals in each occupation at the *parish*-level was constant between 1831 and 1851, before aggregating to the constituency-level. This amounts to the assumption that within-constituency changes in occupational composition between 1831 and 1851 were driven by differential population trends across parishes within the same constituency – for instance, driven by rural-urban migration.

## A.4 Calculation of Earnings and Earnings Dispersion

Table A.2: Correspondence between Williamson Occupations and HISCLASS categories

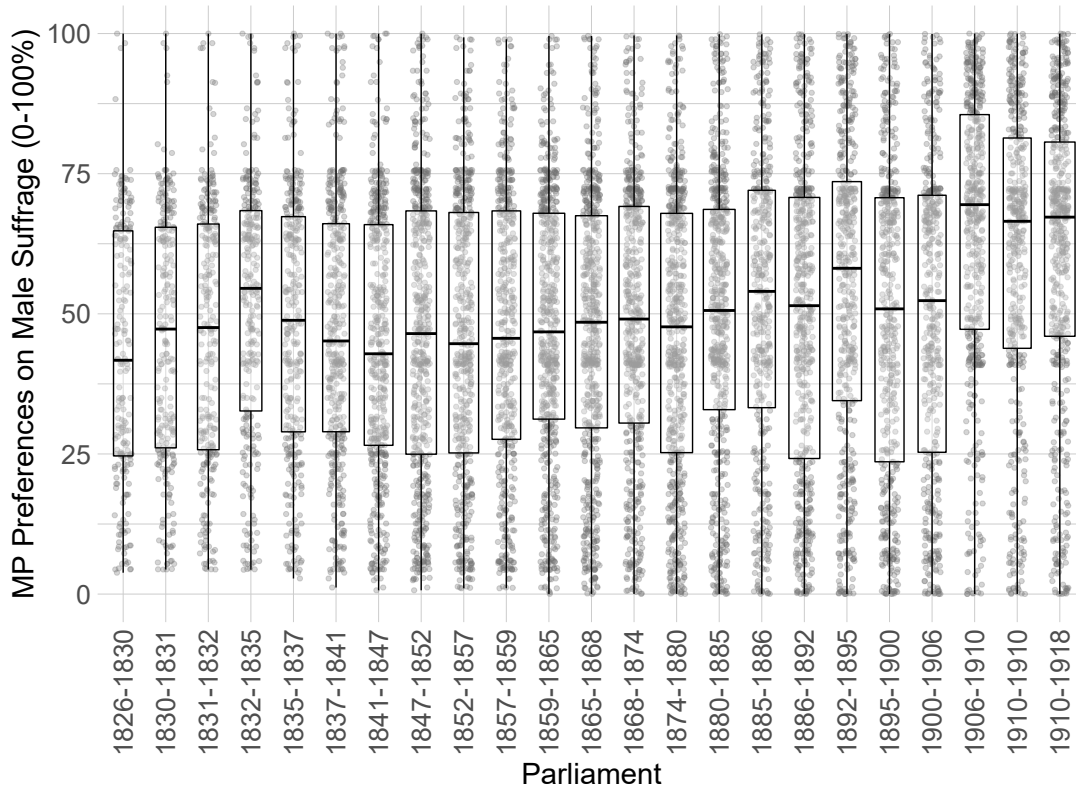
| HISCLASS Categories                                  | General Occupations (Williamson)  | Specific Occupations (Williamson)  |
|--|---|--|
| H01 (Higher Managers) and H02 (Higher Professionals) | 8H (Solicitors and Barristers)<br>10H (Surgeon-Medical Officer)<br><br>12H (Engineer-Surveyor)                                    | Solicitors and Barristers<br>Physician, surgeon, general practitioner<br>Dentist, veterinary surgeon<br>Civil and mining engineer<br>Land, house, ship surveyor      |
| H03 (Lower Managers) and H04 (Lower Professionals)   | 1H (Government High-Wage Civil Service)<br>7H (Clergy)<br>9H (Clerks, Private Sector)<br>11H (Teachers)                           | Civil service (officers and clerks)<br>Clergyman (Established Church), priests, etc.<br>Bank clerks, accountants, etc.<br>Schoolmaster, teacher, professor, lecturer |
| H05 (Lower Clerical and Sales Personnel)             | 4L (Government Low-Wage Civil Employment)<br>5L (Police, Guards, Watchmen)  | Civil service (messengers, etc.)<br>Police, railway guards, prison officers, etc.  |
| H06 (Foremen) and H07 (Medium-skilled Workers)       | 2H (Skilled in Shipbuilding)<br>3H (Skilled in Engineering)<br>4H (Skilled in Building Trades)<br>6H (Skilled in Printing Trades) | Shipwrights<br>Fitters, ironmolders, and turners<br>Bricklayers, masons, carpenters<br>Compositors   |
| H09 (Low-skilled Workers)                            | 5H (Skilled in Textiles)<br>2L (General Nonagricultural Laborers)<br>6L (Miners)  | Spinners in cotton trades<br>Urban common laborers<br>Coal miners  |
| H11 (Unskilled Workers)                              | Domestic Servants   |  |
| H12 (Agricultural Laborers)                          | 1L (Agricultural Laborers)  | Farm laborers  |

Note: We match Williamson’s general occupations with our HISCLASS groups as reported in Column 1 in Table A.2: for example, Williamson’s categories 8H, 10H and 12H correspond to the sum of higher managers and higher professional (H01 and H02). We calculate the earnings of each of our occupational groups (for example, H01+H02) using the size of each occupational group (in the example, 8H, 10H and 12H) as reported by Williamson. Appendix C in Williamson (1982) reports the size of each occupational group (in thousands of males older than 20) in 1821-41. Appendix D in Williamson (1982) reports the size of each occupational group (in thousands of males older than 10) from 1851 to 1911.

## B Methodology

### B.1 Validation of Imputation Procedure

Figure B.1: MPs' Estimated Male Franchise Preferences without Imputation



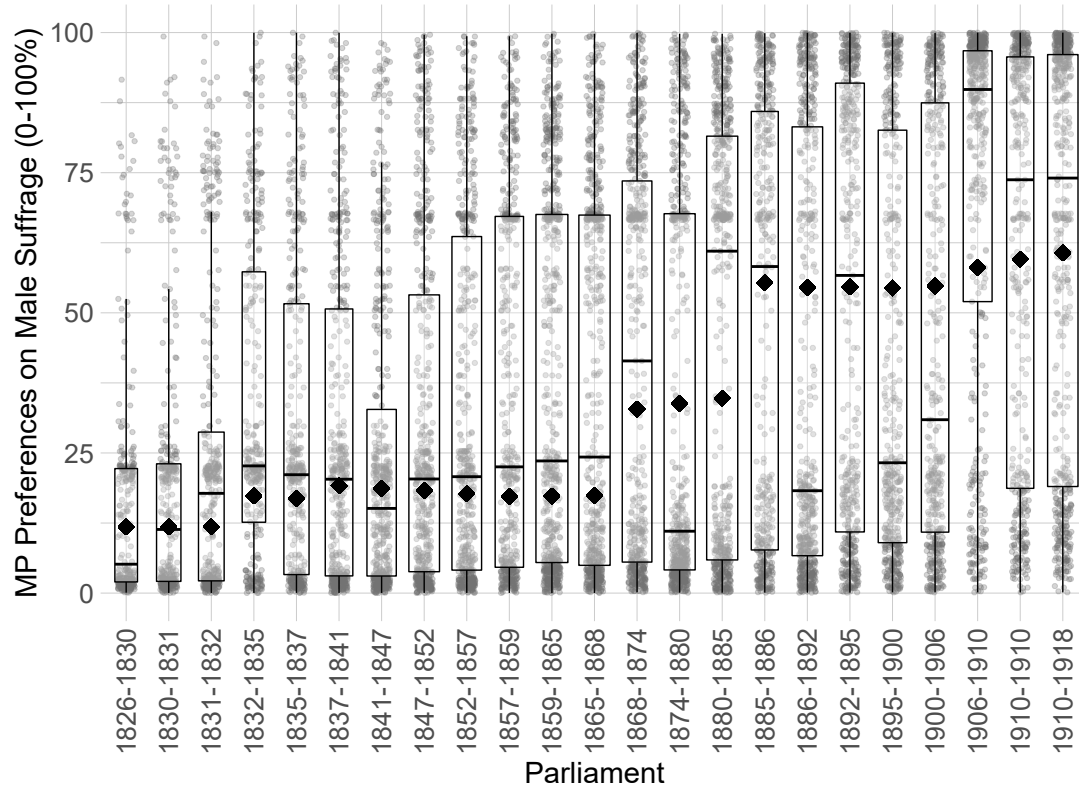
To illustrate the impact of imputation on legislators' ideal point estimates, Figures B.1 and B.2 display the ideal male franchise preferred by members of the House of Commons between 1830 and 1918 with and without imputation, respectively.<sup>41</sup> Both figures indicate the revealed preference of the parliamentarian at the median (dark line) and first and the third quartiles (tips of box) as well as the location of the most extreme MPs (tip of dashed lines). Figure B.2 adds, depicted as a diamond, the status quo franchise in each parliament, based on the proportion of adult men registered to vote at the time.<sup>42</sup>

A comparison of these two figures lends considerable credibility to the estimation procedure with imputation for characterising long-term trends in legislator franchise preferences. Figure B.1 reveals an arguably implausibly small change in the distribution of MP franchise preferences over the course of three franchise extensions and almost a century. By contrast, Figure B.2 reveals three

<sup>41</sup>In order to study legislator preferences on this issue alone, we construct both figures using only votes relating to franchise reform and not those on other issues. The data for the period before 1832 relies on divisions on franchise reform that took place in 1830 and 1831 (and before the elections that led to the reform approved in 1832).

<sup>42</sup>On these calculations, see Appendix A.2.

Figure B.2: MPs' Estimated Male Franchise Preferences with Imputation



main facts. First, we observe a leftward drift in the overall distribution of legislators as well as in the parliamentary median over time—as we would expect to see in an era which began with only 11.8% of adult men eligible to vote and ended with universal male suffrage. Second, variance remained quite high throughout: after 1832, except during the 1841-1847 parliament, the franchise preferred by MPs at the 25th and 75th percentiles differed by at least 40 percentage points until the early twentieth century. Last but not least, the franchise preferred by the median parliamentarian roughly tracked the legal status quo. It did so imperfectly at times, with the former jumping around the latter as a function of the party in power. The median parliamentarian was more favorable to franchise expansion under the Liberal majorities in the 1830s, late 1850s and 1860s. By contrast, he became less progressive once Conservatives secured strong majorities in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

## B.2 Validity and Interpretation of Ideal Point Estimates

In this section, we address several concerns that have been raised in previous research regarding the viability and interpretation of classical ideal point estimation techniques when applied to parliamentary, and especially Westminster, systems.

In terms of interpretation, our analyses suggest that legislators systematically vary in their propensity to vote for legislation implying a higher or lower male franchise. Furthermore, legislators vary in this propensity both within and between parties, for reasons which are correlated with their personal and constituency characteristics. We have argued that the ideal point estimates we present in this paper are measuring this latent variation in legislators’ preferences.<sup>43</sup>

However, previous studies have cast doubt on such an interpretation in the context of parliamentary systems. In particular, it has frequently been observed that both parametric and non-parametric ideal point estimation techniques do not seem to recover ‘correct’ legislator positions when applied to parliamentary, and especially Westminster, systems – typically locating rebellious members of the governing party nearer to the main opposition party than to the bulk of their co-partisans (e.g. Spirling and McLean (2007)). This tendency has been attributed to higher levels of party discipline in parliamentary systems (Rosenthal and Voeten, 2004), as well as the prevalence of government-versus-opposition directed voting, especially in Westminster systems (Dewan and Spirling, 2011; Hix and Noury, 2016). Based on these concerns, it has often been argued that, at least in parliamentary systems, ideal point estimates are better interpreted as measures of party loyalty than as measures of ideology.

To address such concerns, we present five pieces of evidence that indicate that, first, our estimated ideal points do measure meaningful differences in legislators’ propensity to vote for a higher or lower male franchise, and, second, that these differences are not just explained by party affiliation or loyalty. These five pieces of evidence suggest, therefore, that our analysis does seem to be recovering broadly “correct” ideal points, contra previous concerns. After presenting this evidence, we suggest several reasons why these concerns may have been less relevant in our case.

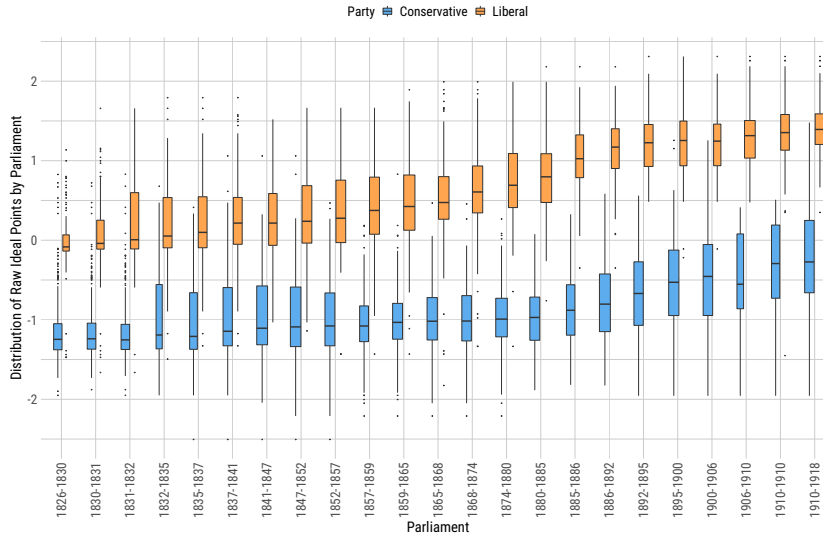
The first piece of evidence is that we observe considerable intra-party heterogeneity in legislators’ franchise preferences throughout all parliaments under consideration, even when we inspect the raw

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<sup>43</sup>As we also note in footnote 19 in Section 3 of the paper, and as also argued by McCarty (2016), our approach does not assume that legislators vote entirely based on sincerely held ideological views. Rather, the ideal points that we recover are best interpreted as a legislator’s average revealed preferences over franchise expansion over their entire career, and may partly reflect strategic considerations faced by the legislator during their career – for instance, based on their party or constituency characteristics.

ideal point estimates (i.e before these are mapped to predicted franchise preferences, following the procedure described on p. 18 of the paper). This is evident from Figure B.3, which plots the raw ideal point estimates for Liberal and Conservative legislators by parliament.

Figure B.3: Major Party Preferences on Male Suffrage (Raw Ideal Points)



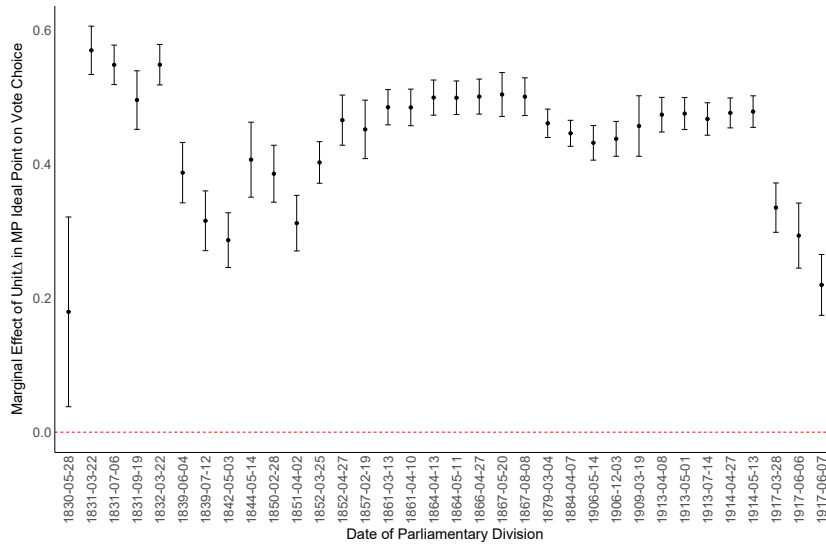
Second, we find that our estimated ideal points remain strong predictors of legislators’ choices on key votes even after controlling for legislators’ party affiliation and propensity to rebel – and this remains true throughout the period, even in votes taking place in the early twentieth century (e.g. the Asquith motion in March 1909 and the wartime votes). This is demonstrated in Figure B.4, which presents the marginal effects of MPs’ estimated (raw) ideal points, including 95% confidence intervals, on their decisions on key franchise votes between 1830 and 1917, based on results from a legislator-level linear regression (i) without controls (Figure B.4a), and (ii) including legislators’ party affiliation and propensity to rebel as controls (Figure B.4b), respectively. Here, we measure a legislator’s propensity to rebel as the proportion of times a legislator voted with the minority in their party on a franchise-related division (both key and non-key votes).<sup>44</sup>

Third, unlike in Spirling and McLean’s (2007) analysis of ideal point estimation applied to the 1997-2001 House of Commons, we do not estimate party leaders as being on the extremes of their parties, as we might have expected if our ideal points were measuring party loyalty rather than legislators’ franchise preferences. This is demonstrated in Figure B.5, which plots, for each parliament, the estimated franchise preferences of Liberal and Conservative party leaders alongside their co-partisans.<sup>45</sup> This figure illustrates that our approach typically estimates party leaders as being moderate figures within their parties. By contrast, we estimate known advocates of universal male

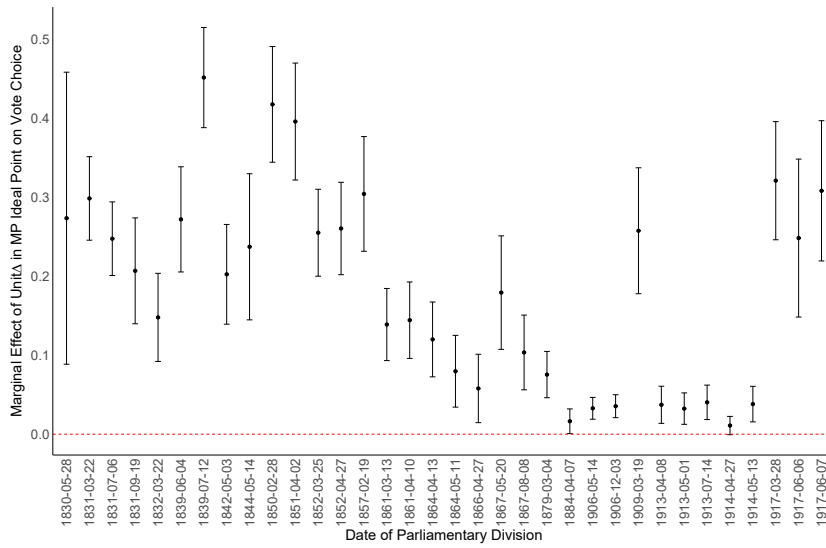
<sup>44</sup>Results are virtually identical if we substitute MPs’ predicted franchise preferences as the dependent variable.

<sup>45</sup>As we only recover ideal point estimates for legislators representing seats in England and Wales in the House of Commons, there are two instances where we do not estimate an ideal for the Liberal leader, as the individual concerned only ever represented constituencies in Scotland. In these cases, the figure plots the preferences of another senior cabinet or shadow cabinet member: Herbert Gladstone, in place of Henry Campbell-Bannerman, between 1898 and 1908, and David Lloyd George in place of H. H. Asquith, between 1908 and 1918.

Figure B.4: Explanatory Power of Ideal Points

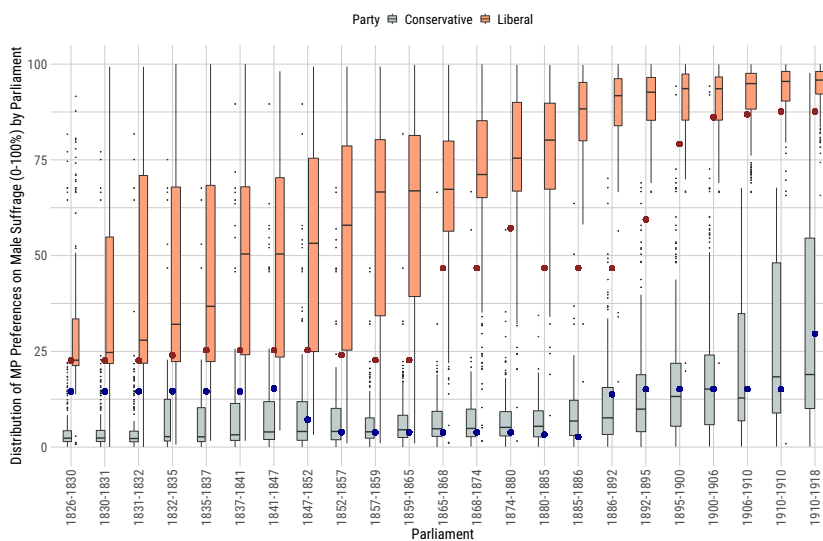


(a) Overall (No Controls)



(b) Controlling for Party Affiliation + Propensity to Rebel

Figure B.5: Estimated Locations of Party Leaders



suffrage—for example, the Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor or the Radical MP John Bright—as preferring a male franchise close to 100%. Our approach also places the ‘Adullamites’—a collection of Whigs and moderate Liberals prominent in the debates surrounding the 1867 reform—as among the most conservative members of the Liberal party in the 1865-68 parliament.

Fourth, although both the Liberal and Conservative party leaderships changed their position on franchise extension over the course of this period – the Liberal party under Gladstone in the 1860s, and eventually, the Conservative party led by Bonar-Law during the First World War – when inspecting MP decisions on key franchise votes, we find that the behavior of most legislators was consistent with proximity voting and an individual ideal point that was stable over time. That is, it appears that most legislators voted as if, throughout their career, there was some franchise that they consistently preferred. In particular, of the 4,077 legislators whose decisions we analyze, we find that only 217 legislators – 5.3% of the total – voted inconsistently on at least one key vote. This is far lower than what we might expect if legislator decisions on these votes were primarily motivated by the party line.

Last but not least, the regression results we report in Section 5 and Appendix C – all of which derive from specifications that control for party – reveal that our estimates of legislators’ franchise preferences are correlated with exactly the constituency and personal characteristics that we might expect, given our theory. All of these patterns are significantly more consistent with an interpretation of our estimates as meaningful measures of legislators’ franchise preferences than as measures of loyalty to the party line on franchise reform.

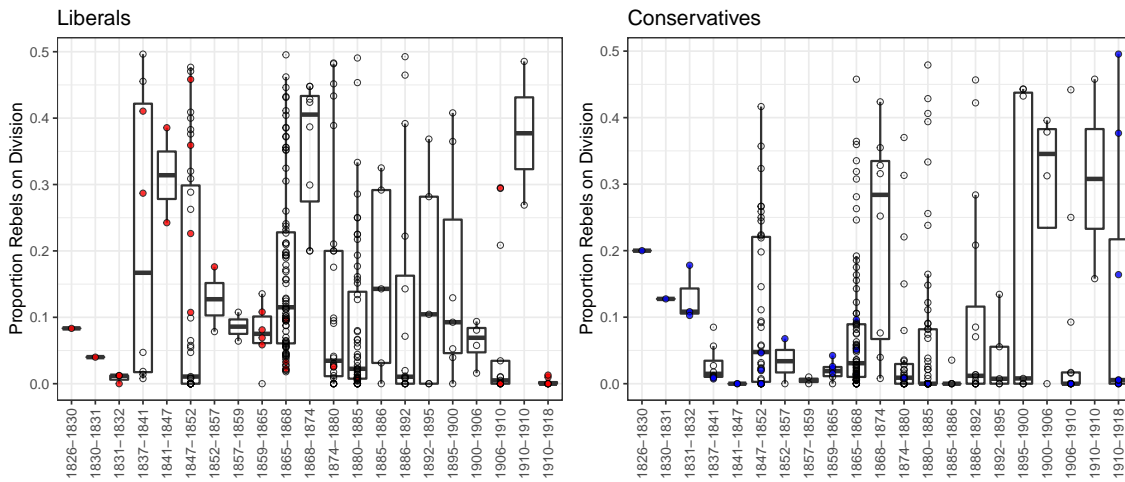
We suggest three possible reasons why we have been able to recover meaningful estimates of legislator preferences using ideal point estimation in our case – in contrast to similar approaches applied to the contemporary House of Commons, which have produced ideal point estimates with more troubling characteristics.

In the first place, although party cohesion in the nineteenth century House of Commons was undoubtedly (already) high (Cox, 1987; Schonhardt-Bailey, 2003; Eggers and Spirling, 2014b), it is nevertheless the case that both parties – though especially the Liberals – faced sizeable rebellions

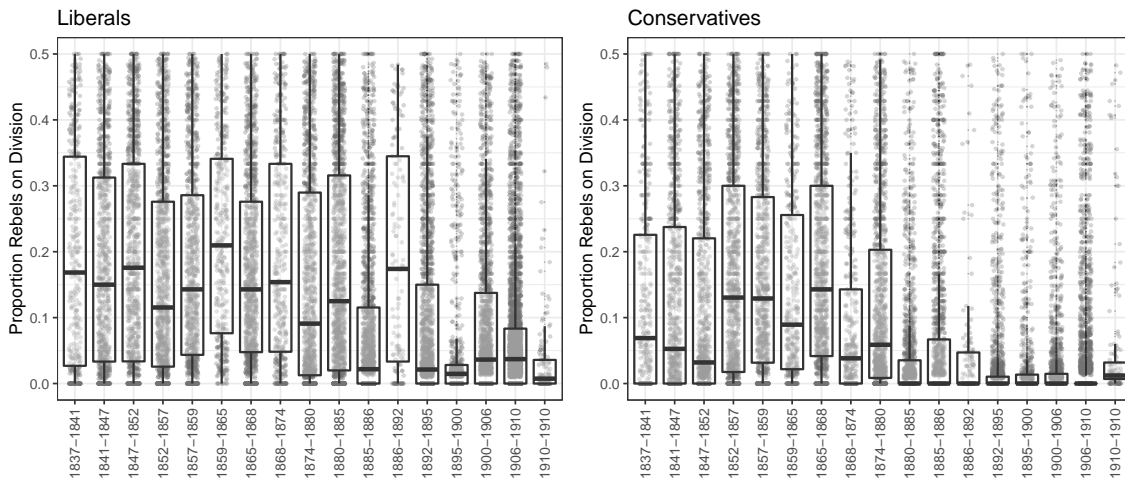
from legislators throughout, and that such rebellions were slightly more likely on votes dealing with franchise reform than on other votes. This is evident from Figures B.6a and B.6b, which plot the proportion of major party rebels on each franchise and non-franchise division, respectively. In each figure, the size of the rebellion is given by the proportion of legislators (Liberal or Conservative) who voted against the majority of their party (measured before imputation). In Figure B.6a, key votes are highlighted in red (for the Liberals) and blue (for the Conservatives).

Figure B.6: Prevalence of Rebellions, 1830-1918

(a) Franchise Votes, 1830–1918



(b) All Votes, 1836–1910



Even if most MPs typically voted alongside their party in this period (Eggers and Spirling, 2014b), we find that, on average, 12.5% of Liberal MPs and 7.6% of Conservative MPs rebelled across all votes, and 13.3% of Liberals and 8.4% of Conservatives rebelled on franchise votes.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, in both cases, the distribution of rebellions is right-skewed; although the majority of votes – on franchise reform and otherwise – were (almost) party-line votes, more than a fifth of Liberal parliamentarians

<sup>46</sup>Note that our analysis is restricted to MPs representing constituencies in England and Wales.

rebelled on 26.4% of divisions (26.7% of franchise votes), and more than a third rebelled on 14.3% of divisions (15.7% of franchise votes).<sup>47</sup> This pattern is not just driven by votes of little significance, as we observe significant rebellions even on key franchise votes, and – at least in the case of franchise votes – such rebellions remained a regular occurrence even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even if we consider only divisions on franchise reform that took place after 1859 – after which, according to Eggers and Spirling (2014*b*), a rebellious ‘left tail’ faded away – we find that, on average, 13.2% of Liberals and 8.2% of Conservatives continued to rebel on these votes. Prominent examples are given by the vote on the Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill on 19 March 1909, when 29.5% of the Liberal MPs present rebelled to vote *against* near-universal suffrage for men (and some women), as well as the wartime votes on universal suffrage, where as many as 49.5% of the Conservatives present continued to vote against (on 28 March 1917).

In short, there was sufficient intra-party heterogeneity even in the later period (in the issue at hand) to allow us to identify and compare legislator preferences using ideal point estimation techniques. Once we impute behavior for legislators on divisions where they were not actually present, the degree of intra-party heterogeneity is greater still, aiding comparison of legislators from the same party who served in very different time periods.

In the second place, we find that rebels voted against the leadership of *both* major parties on many divisions on franchise reform. This was true on all franchise votes taking place in the 1840s and 1850s – most of which took place in response to petitions and private members’ bills, not government legislation – and again in 1917, when a substantial minority of Conservative MPs voted against near-universal male suffrage, with both the Conservative and Liberal leaderships voting in favor. Thus, legislators did not necessarily vote along government-versus-opposition lines on franchise votes.

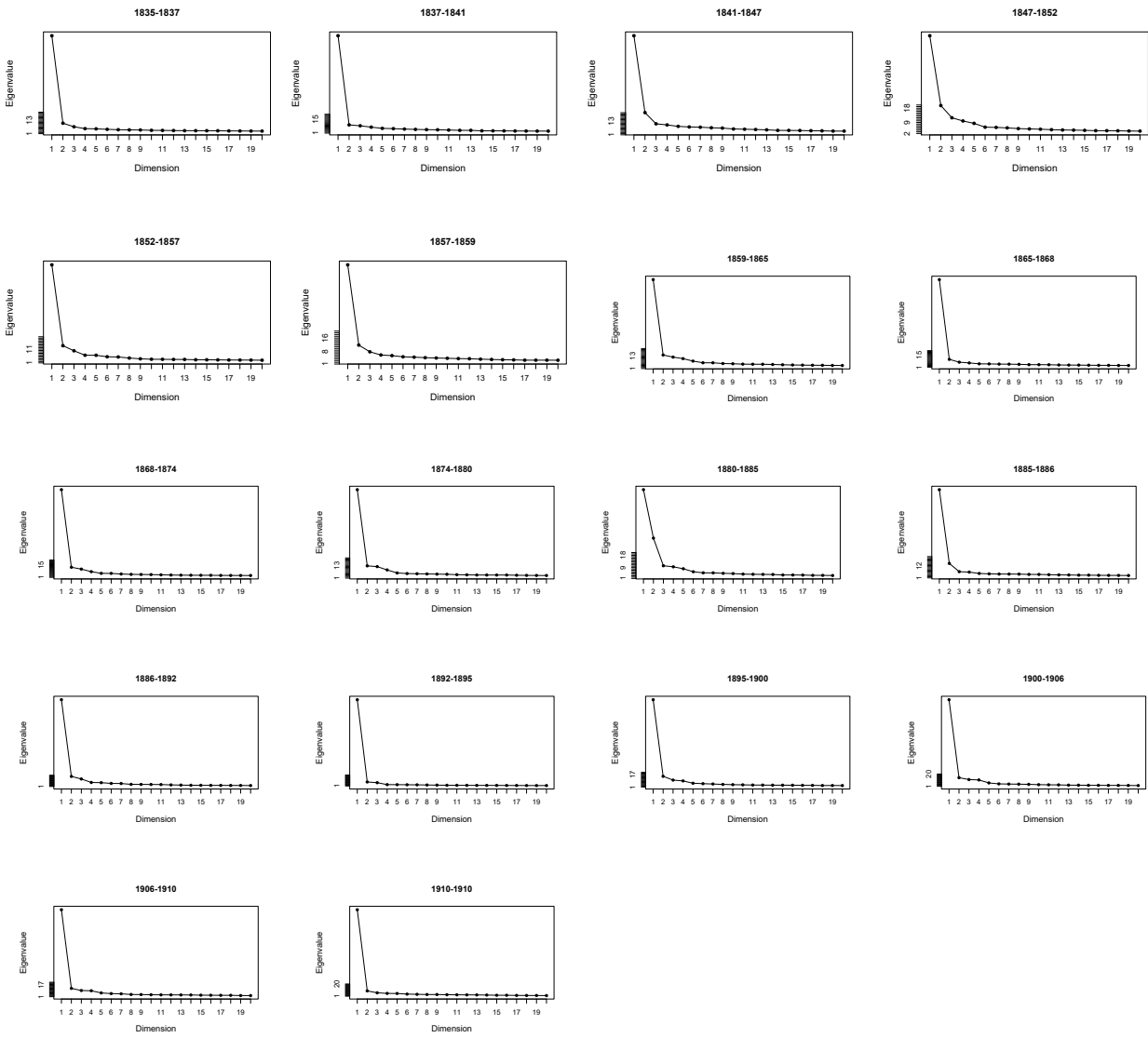
Finally, our consideration of votes from parliaments spanning a large number of decades, as well as our imputation procedure – which increases the weight placed by the estimator on our selected (plausibly non-strategic) key votes – may have mitigated the impact of party strategic considerations on our ideal point estimates.

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<sup>47</sup>In comparison, more than a fifth of Conservative parliamentarians rebelled on 16.0% of divisions (16.7% of franchise votes) and more than a third rebelled on 8.8% of divisions (8.3% of franchise votes).

## B.3 Unidimensionality of the Issue Space

Figure B.7: Scree Plots by Parliament, All Divisions 1836–1910



## C Additional Results

### C.1 Analysis of MP Franchise Preferences by Party

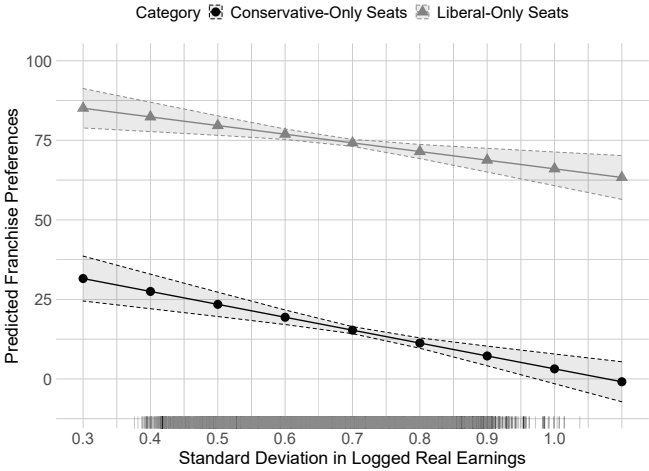
Table C.1: OLS Analysis of the Covariates of MP Franchise Preferences

|   | (1)                 | (2)                | (3)                 | (4)                 |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Proportion Liberal                        | -50.81<br>(34.82)   | 69.25<br>(103.12)  | 64.84<br>(36.95)    | 79.68*<br>(34.25)   |
| Proportion Conservative                   | 54.44<br>(35.53)    | 68.10<br>(104.50)  | 31.84<br>(38.30)    | 32.09<br>(35.13)    |
| Proportion Radical Left                   | 115.04*<br>(50.93)  | 130.56<br>(233.20) | 112.05*<br>(56.59)  | 131.92**<br>(47.51) |
| Earnings Inequality                       | 61.33***<br>(16.63) | 76.77*<br>(31.04)  | 66.45***<br>(18.88) | 81.57***<br>(15.83) |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Liberal            | 34.12*<br>(16.29)   | 51.24<br>(32.67)   | 39.35*<br>(17.14)   | 27.24<br>(16.28)    |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Conservative       | 20.77<br>(16.58)    | 27.95<br>(33.01)   | 36.25*<br>(17.91)   | 16.51<br>(16.67)    |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Rad. Left          | 76.61***<br>(21.12) | 69.39<br>(57.19)   | 86.84***<br>(24.71) | 73.19***<br>(20.15) |
| Log Mean Earnings                         | 12.92<br>(9.03)     | 32.42<br>(28.82)   | 8.87<br>(10.62)     | 26.14***<br>(7.01)  |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Liberal         | 9.85<br>(7.52)      | 21.69<br>(30.32)   | 11.99<br>(7.97)     | 17.44*<br>(7.41)    |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Conservative    | 26.15**<br>(7.57)   | 27.18<br>(30.60)   | 23.97**<br>(8.10)   | 20.12**<br>(7.53)   |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Rad. Left       | 31.55**<br>(11.55)  | 35.75<br>(56.35)   | 32.81*<br>(12.99)   | 34.38**<br>(10.65)  |
| Prop. Agricultural Employ.                | 71.02***<br>(10.49) | 55.44*<br>(22.15)  | 73.17***<br>(11.58) | 60.10***<br>(9.82)  |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Liberal      | 71.15***<br>(10.18) | 51.46*<br>(23.20)  | 76.42***<br>(10.68) | 76.43***<br>(9.96)  |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Conservative | 72.82***<br>(10.53) | 68.21**<br>(23.32) | 77.74***<br>(11.35) | 75.46***<br>(10.49) |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Rad. Left    | 75.78**<br>(21.84)  | 75.33<br>(49.17)   | 81.64***<br>(22.12) | 77.69***<br>(21.18) |
| Proportion Landowners                     | 3.01**<br>(0.93)    | 2.74**<br>(0.93)   | 3.97***<br>(0.98)   | 3.46***<br>(0.94)   |
| Proportion Peers                          | 3.15**<br>(1.01)    | 3.08**<br>(1.00)   | 3.26**<br>(1.01)    | 3.06**<br>(1.02)    |
| Proportion Officeholders                  | 2.41*<br>(1.21)     | 2.24<br>(1.23)     | 2.92*<br>(1.38)     | 2.41*<br>(1.22)     |
| Non Anglican Pastors per 1000 Persons     | 2.01<br>(1.13)      | 1.82<br>(1.11)     | 1.34<br>(1.27)      | 1.36<br>(0.96)      |
| Log Population Density                    | 0.87**<br>(0.32)    | 0.81*<br>(0.32)    | 0.92*<br>(0.40)     | 0.98**<br>(0.32)    |
| By Election                               | 1.31*<br>(0.63)     | 1.66*<br>(0.64)    | 0.78<br>(0.68)      | 1.00<br>(0.65)      |
| Number of Seats                           | 1.14<br>(0.73)      | 0.37<br>(0.71)     | 0.85<br>(0.80)      | 3.36***<br>(0.68)   |
| Constituency REs                          | ×                   | ×                  |                     | ×                   |
| County FEs                                |                     |                    | ×                   |                     |
| Parliament FEs                            | ×                   |                    | ×                   |                     |
| Party-Parliament FEs                      |                     | ×                  |                     |                     |
| Observations                              | 8,204               | 8,204              | 8,204               | 8,204               |
| R <sup>2</sup>                            | 0.768               | 0.775              | 0.774               | 0.763               |

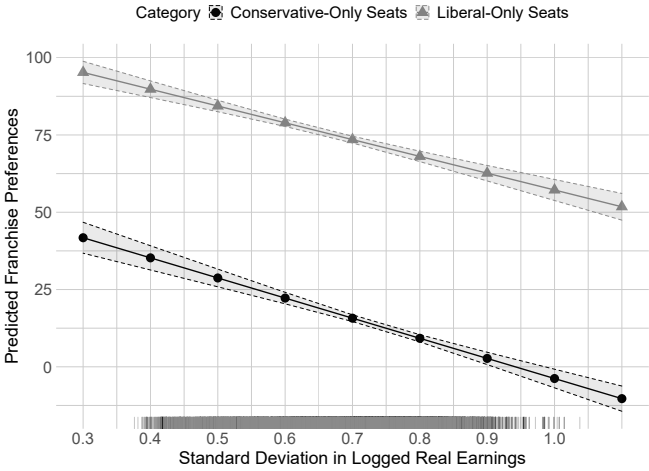
\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Note: Cell entries present coefficient estimates from OLS models of MPs' preferences over the size of the male franchise. Standard errors clustered by parliamentary constituency are given in parentheses.

Figure C.1: Predicted Franchise Preferences Conditional on Party and Earnings Inequality

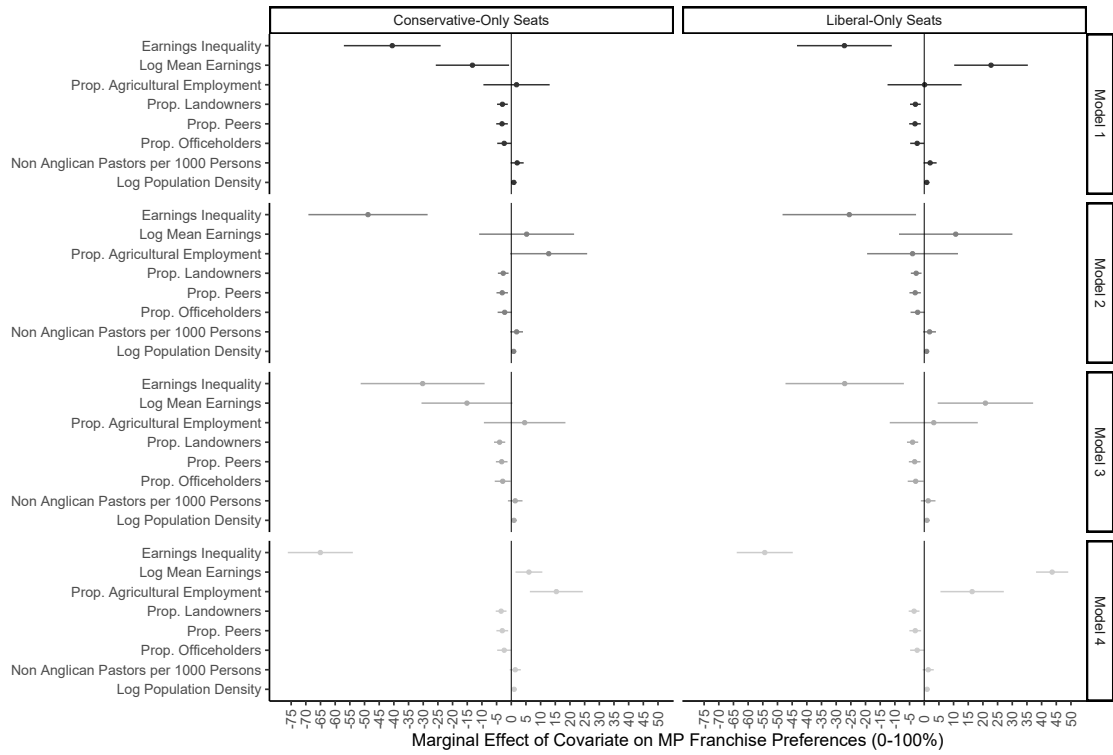


(a) Baseline Specification (Model 1)



(b) Excluding Parliament Fixed Effects (Model 4)

Figure C.2: Marginal Effects of Key Covariates based on Table C.1 Estimates



## C.2 Analysis of MP Franchise Preferences by Reform Period

Table C.2: OLS Analysis of MP Franchise Preferences by Reform Period

|   | (1) 1832-1868      | (2) 1868-1886      | (3) 1886-1918       |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Proportion Liberal                        | 41.60<br>(49.02)   | 93.69<br>(130.74)  | 176.00<br>(323.74)  |
| Proportion Conservative                   | 94.94*<br>(47.58)  | 38.74<br>(130.77)  | 182.54<br>(322.22)  |
| Proportion Radical Left                   |                    | 265.05<br>(177.71) | 97.26<br>(321.43)   |
| Earnings Inequality                       | 52.10*<br>(25.59)  | 95.68<br>(50.86)   | 122.40**<br>(45.10) |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Liberal            | 12.53<br>(26.42)   | 44.50<br>(50.53)   | 120.11**<br>(43.57) |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Conservative       | 51.47<br>(26.49)   | 14.47<br>(52.11)   | 65.29<br>(44.18)    |
| Earnings Ineq. * Prop. Rad. Left          |                    | 22.60<br>(66.99)   | 137.51**<br>(45.41) |
| Log Mean Earnings                         | 25.57<br>(14.31)   | 44.20<br>(33.66)   | 25.39<br>(74.38)    |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Liberal         | 7.74<br>(13.13)    | 22.55<br>(32.98)   | 24.72<br>(74.55)    |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Conservative    | 40.48**<br>(12.31) | 21.12<br>(33.25)   | 18.84<br>(74.17)    |
| Log Mean Earnings * Prop. Rad. Left       |                    | 57.97<br>(41.63)   | 6.10<br>(74.02)     |
| Prop. Agricultural Employ.                | 44.55**<br>(15.62) | 66.08*<br>(27.71)  | 20.71<br>(38.30)    |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Liberal      | 38.54**<br>(14.85) | 63.36*<br>(27.10)  | 16.58<br>(37.76)    |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Conservative | 48.82**<br>(14.38) | 89.78**<br>(27.51) | 28.13<br>(36.96)    |
| Agricultural Employ. * Prop. Rad. Left    |                    | 91.27**<br>(33.42) | 27.08<br>(42.55)    |
| Prop. Landowners                          | 1.65<br>(1.55)     | 5.21***<br>(1.48)  | 5.31**<br>(1.55)    |
| Prop. Peers                               | 7.84***<br>(1.78)  | 2.06<br>(1.67)     | 0.26<br>(1.46)      |
| Prop. Officeholders                       | 4.49<br>(2.30)     | 3.41<br>(2.68)     | 1.51<br>(1.45)      |
| Non Anglican Pastors per 1000 Persons     | 0.55<br>(2.25)     | 1.05<br>(1.51)     | 4.45*<br>(1.77)     |
| Log Population Density                    | 2.42**<br>(0.70)   | 0.06<br>(0.55)     | 0.49<br>(0.44)      |
| By Election                               | 2.43<br>(1.40)     | 0.11<br>(1.62)     | 2.19**<br>(0.77)    |
| Number Seats                              | 1.54<br>(1.14)     | 0.51<br>(0.98)     | 2.16<br>(1.76)      |
| Constituency REs                          | ×                  | ×                  | ×                   |
| Parliament FEs                            | ×                  | ×                  | ×                   |
| Observations                              | 3,100              | 1,619              | 3,485               |
| R <sup>2</sup>                            | 0.596              | 0.801              | 0.821               |

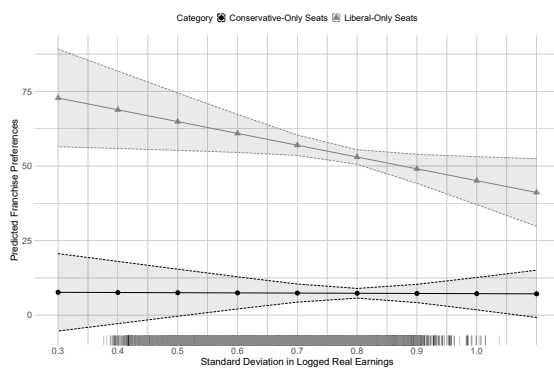
\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Note: This table presents the results when we re-estimate Model (1) from Table C.1 after restricting attention to each reform period in turn. Standard errors are clustered by parliamentary constituency.

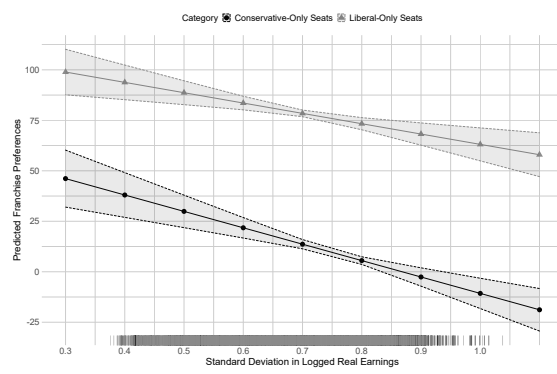
## C.3 Effects of Trends in Social Class Composition

Figure C.3: Predicted Franchise Preferences Conditional on Party and Inequality by Period

(a) 1832-1868



(b) 1868-1886



(c) 1886-1918

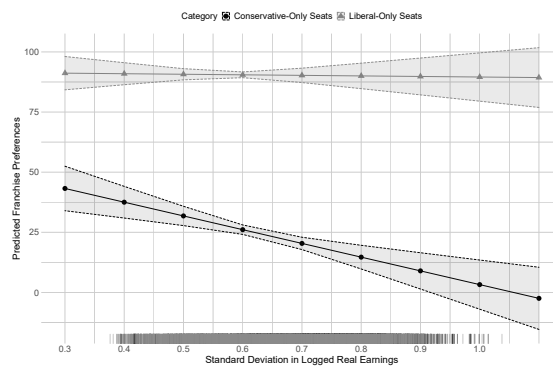


Table C.3: Social Class Composition and MP Franchise Preferences

|                                     | (1)                  | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Prop. Liberal                       | 84.58***<br>(13.18)  | 84.05***<br>(14.42)  | 96.77***<br>(13.61)  | 75.34***<br>(13.57)  |
| Prop. Conservative                  | 44.06**<br>(13.45)   | 60.48***<br>(14.90)  | 52.38***<br>(14.20)  | 40.10**<br>(13.54)   |
| Prop. Radical Left                  | 138.71***<br>(35.42) | 91.35**<br>(32.55)   | 168.67***<br>(29.88) | 110.53**<br>(39.09)  |
| Prop. Non-Manual                    | 168.58***<br>(33.73) | 145.81***<br>(34.77) | 166.11***<br>(36.17) | 9.92<br>(28.60)      |
| Non-Manual * Liberal                | 54.72<br>(29.74)     | 71.70*<br>(30.68)    | 55.32<br>(30.70)     | 13.29<br>(29.59)     |
| Non-Manual * Conservative           | 153.27***<br>(29.10) | 132.10***<br>(30.27) | 154.10***<br>(30.51) | 114.36***<br>(29.09) |
| Non-Manual * Rad. Left              | 118.07*<br>(46.54)   | 83.09<br>(45.17)     | 149.96***<br>(41.73) | 41.59<br>(50.40)     |
| Prop. Skilled Agricultural          | 67.22<br>(49.28)     | 61.65<br>(48.16)     | 94.08<br>(53.87)     | 39.93<br>(49.37)     |
| Skilled Agr. * Liberal              | 34.27<br>(50.71)     | 2.73<br>(49.09)      | 5.13<br>(53.03)      | 66.22<br>(52.32)     |
| Skilled Agr. * Conservative         | 8.64<br>(51.95)      | 0.36<br>(49.95)      | 24.54<br>(55.11)     | 6.56<br>(53.36)      |
| Skilled Agr. * Rad. Left            | 44.78<br>(131.61)    | 83.55<br>(121.03)    | 92.72<br>(142.30)    | 125.56<br>(140.99)   |
| Prop. Unskilled Industrial          | 98.87<br>(62.77)     | 81.85<br>(62.37)     | 46.15<br>(67.69)     | 115.85<br>(61.64)    |
| Unskilled Ind. * Liberal            | 116.26<br>(65.62)    | 102.47<br>(64.34)    | 68.74<br>(69.64)     | 99.92<br>(64.34)     |
| Unskilled Ind. * Conservative       | 115.20<br>(65.65)    | 90.43<br>(65.71)     | 66.69<br>(70.56)     | 90.42<br>(64.24)     |
| Unskilled Ind. * Rad. Left          | 37.50<br>(76.12)     | 41.68<br>(78.00)     | 52.34<br>(78.79)     | 46.08<br>(81.86)     |
| Prop. Low Skilled Industrial        | 134.50***<br>(15.62) | 119.16***<br>(16.26) | 131.98***<br>(17.26) | 91.34***<br>(14.99)  |
| Low Skilled Ind. * Liberal          | 83.01***<br>(15.60)  | 81.04***<br>(16.00)  | 88.71***<br>(16.38)  | 74.47***<br>(15.77)  |
| Low Skilled Ind. * Conservative     | 104.53***<br>(16.57) | 88.68***<br>(17.09)  | 111.53***<br>(17.80) | 99.60***<br>(16.45)  |
| Low Skilled Ind. * Rad. Left        | 132.54***<br>(35.87) | 102.62**<br>(32.57)  | 155.06***<br>(30.20) | 112.82**<br>(39.53)  |
| Prop. Medium Skilled Industrial     | 159.54***<br>(27.12) | 143.35***<br>(26.58) | 158.25***<br>(30.16) | 85.43**<br>(26.86)   |
| Medium Skilled Ind. * Liberal       | 107.63***<br>(27.58) | 103.49***<br>(27.13) | 120.31***<br>(29.44) | 112.26***<br>(28.44) |
| Medium Skilled Ind. * Conservative  | 92.44**<br>(29.52)   | 97.75**<br>(29.08)   | 99.46**<br>(31.52)   | 113.23***<br>(29.97) |
| Medium Skilled Ind. * Rad. Left     | 139.08**<br>(48.98)  | 121.68**<br>(44.58)  | 153.91***<br>(41.99) | 127.25*<br>(51.97)   |
| Prop. Other                         | 292.28**<br>(90.27)  | 198.27*<br>(96.77)   | 290.97**<br>(94.60)  | 160.25<br>(83.45)    |
| Other * Liberal                     | 241.34*<br>(96.19)   | 97.44<br>(102.38)    | 266.09**<br>(101.55) | 233.25*<br>(90.84)   |
| Other * Conservative                | 166.73<br>(94.54)    | 142.19<br>(101.02)   | 161.31<br>(99.09)    | 99.76<br>(87.28)     |
| Other * Rad. Left                   | 438.96*<br>(195.36)  | 244.25<br>(159.42)   | 465.56*<br>(224.69)  | 296.88<br>(158.03)   |
| Log Mean Earnings                   | 49.45***<br>(9.50)   | 34.95***<br>(9.34)   | 48.55***<br>(11.22)  | 35.43***<br>(2.09)   |
| Prop. Landowners                    | 2.81**<br>(0.96)     | 2.63**<br>(0.93)     | 3.95***<br>(1.01)    | 4.42***<br>(0.99)    |
| Prop. Peers                         | 2.99**<br>(1.04)     | 2.88**<br>(1.00)     | 3.07**<br>(1.04)     | 2.98**<br>(1.08)     |
| Prop. Officeholders                 | 2.61*<br>(1.22)      | 2.39<br>(1.22)       | 2.85*<br>(1.41)      | 2.62*<br>(1.24)      |
| Non-Anglican Pastors / 1000 Persons | 2.60*<br>(1.19)      | 1.69<br>(1.13)       | 1.37<br>(1.34)       | 1.19<br>(1.03)       |
| Log Population Density              | 1.22**               | 1.15**               | 1.24**               | 2.03***              |

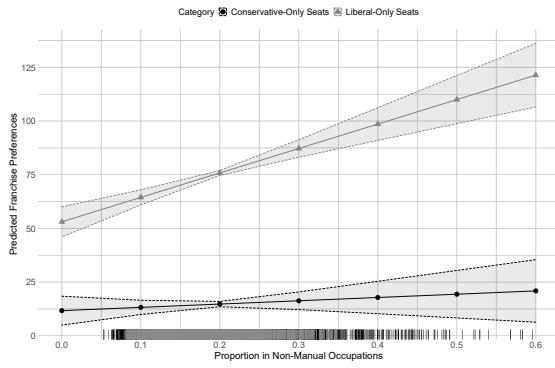
Table C.3: Social Class Composition and MP Franchise Preferences

|                      | (1)                       | (2)                        | (3)                      | (4)                      |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| By Election          | (0.37)<br>1.36*<br>(0.65) | (0.36)<br>1.71**<br>(0.64) | (0.43)<br>0.82<br>(0.70) | (0.38)<br>0.85<br>(0.68) |
| Number of Seats      | 0.66<br>(0.75)            | 0.39<br>(0.72)             | 0.18<br>(0.83)           | 5.15***<br>(0.71)        |
| Constituency REs     | ×                         | ×                          |                          | ×                        |
| County FEs           |                           |                            | ×                        |                          |
| Parliament FEs       | ×                         |                            | ×                        |                          |
| Party-Parliament FEs |                           | ×                          |                          |                          |
| Observations         | 8,204                     | 8,204                      | 8,204                    | 8,204                    |
| R <sup>2</sup>       | 0.764                     | 0.776                      | 0.770                    | 0.746                    |

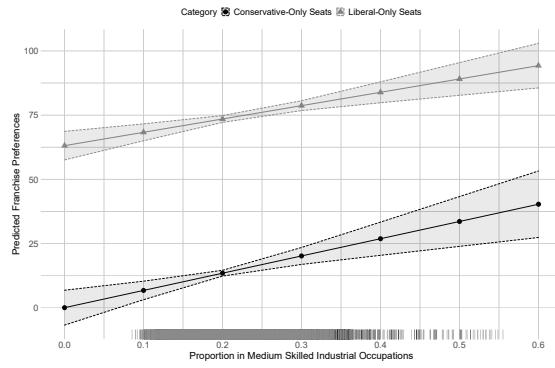
\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Note: This table presents the results when we re-estimate Models (1)–(4) from Table C.1 after substituting social class categories for earnings inequality and the proportion of adults employed in agriculture. We map HISCLASS to social class categories as follows: nonmanual occupations (HISCLASS categories 1 through 5); non-agricultural medium-skilled manual workers (HISCLASS 6 and 7); non-agricultural low-skilled manual workers (HISCLASS 9); non-agricultural unskilled manual workers (HISCLASS 11); skilled agricultural occupations (HISCLASS 8 and 10); unskilled agricultural laborers (HISCLASS 12); other miscellaneous or unknown occupations (HISCLASS 13 and 99). Standard errors are clustered by parliamentary constituency.

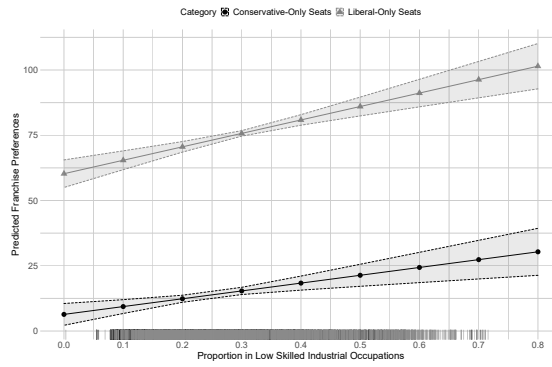
Figure C.4: Pred. Franchise Preferences Conditional on Party and Constituency Composition



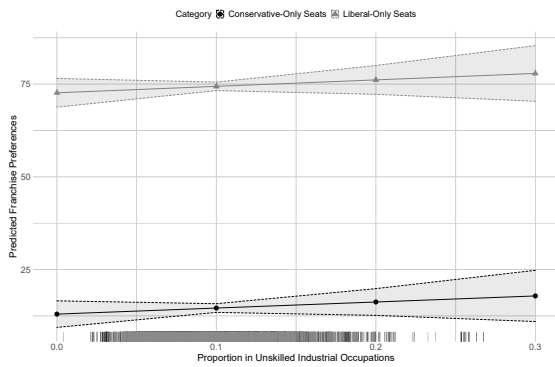
(a) Non-Manual Occupations



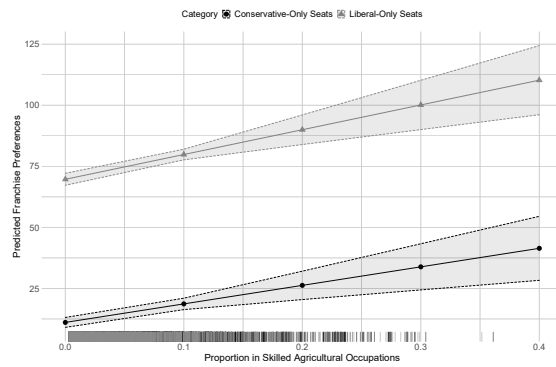
(b) Medium-Skilled Industrial Occupations



(c) Low-Skilled Industrial Occupations



(d) Unskilled Industrial Occupations



(e) Skilled Agricultural Occupations

## C.4 Robustness Checks

Table C.4: Additional Analyses of the Covariates of MP Franchise Preferences

|                                       | (1)             | (2)             | (3)              |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Proportion Liberal                    | 0.79<br>(0.06)  | 0.82<br>(0.06)  | 31.12<br>(2.29)  |
| Proportion Conservative               | -0.73<br>(0.06) | -0.80<br>(0.06) | -28.56<br>(2.29) |
| Proportion Radical Left               | 0.87<br>(0.07)  | 0.91<br>(0.08)  | 33.40<br>(2.62)  |
| Labour Entry                          |                 |                 | -0.35<br>(1.44)  |
| Earnings Inequality                   | -0.95<br>(0.21) | -1.32<br>(0.22) | -43.77<br>(7.55) |
| Log Mean Earnings                     | 0.09<br>(0.18)  | 0.50<br>(0.19)  | 7.92<br>(6.37)   |
| Prop. in Agricultural Employment      | 0.08<br>(0.16)  | 0.21<br>(0.17)  | 5.30<br>(5.40)   |
| Proportion Landowners                 | -0.06<br>(0.03) | -0.05<br>(0.03) | -2.35<br>(0.98)  |
| Proportion Peers                      | -0.11<br>(0.03) | -0.11<br>(0.03) | -2.94<br>(1.04)  |
| Proportion Officeholders              | -0.07<br>(0.03) | -0.03<br>(0.04) | -2.34<br>(1.19)  |
| Non Anglican Pastors per 1000 Persons | 0.06<br>(0.03)  | 0.04<br>(0.03)  | 2.90<br>(1.18)   |
| Log Population Density                | 0.04<br>(0.01)  | 0.03<br>(0.01)  | 0.97<br>(0.33)   |
| By Election                           | 0.01<br>(0.02)  | -0.05<br>(0.02) | 0.69<br>(0.69)   |
| Number of Seats                       | -0.04<br>(0.02) | -0.03<br>(0.02) | -0.55<br>(0.81)  |
| Observations                          | 8,204           | 8,071           | 8,204            |
| R <sup>2</sup>                        | 0.738           | 0.730           | 0.752            |

p<0.05; p<0.01; p<0.001

Note: Cell entries present coefficient estimates from OLS models of MPs' preferences over the size of the male franchise (standard errors clustered by constituency). Models (1) and (2) re-estimate Model (1) from Table 1, but with legislators' raw ideal points (on a scale with mean 0 and SD 1) as the dependent variable estimated (i) with imputation and (ii) without imputation, respectively. Since imputation chiefly improves our ability to compare legislators that do *not* serve in the same, or neighboring, parliaments, as discussed on p. 13, it is intuitive that, once we include parliament fixed effects, we observe a similar relationship between legislators' preferences and their constituency and personal characteristics when these preferences are estimated with and without imputation. Model (3) re-estimates Model (1) from Table 1 while including a control for whether the Labour party fielded a candidate in that constituency.

Table C.5: Socioeconomic Covariates of Election Outcomes

|                                  | (1) Prop. Lib   | (2) Prop. Lib   | (3) Prop. Cons | (4) Prop. Cons  |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Earnings Inequality              | -0.63<br>(0.07) | -1.02<br>(0.18) | 0.82<br>(0.06) | 1.25<br>(0.17)  |
| Log Mean Earnings                |                 | 0.24<br>(0.16)  |                | -0.37<br>(0.15) |
| Prop. in Agricultural Employment |                 | -0.53<br>(0.15) |                | 0.47<br>(0.15)  |
| Non Anglican Pastors (p. 1000)   |                 | 0.11<br>(0.03)  |                | -0.09<br>(0.03) |
| Log Population Density           |                 | -0.02<br>(0.01) |                | 0.02<br>(0.01)  |
| By Election                      |                 | -0.13<br>(0.01) |                | -0.13<br>(0.01) |
| Number of Seats                  |                 | -0.09<br>(0.02) |                | -0.00<br>(0.02) |
| Constituency REs                 | ×               | ×               | ×              | ×               |
| Parliament FEs                   | ×               | ×               | ×              | ×               |
| Observations                     | 9,075           | 9,075           | 9,075          | 9,075           |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.01            | 0.15            | 0.02           | 0.20            |

p<0.05; p<0.01; p<0.001

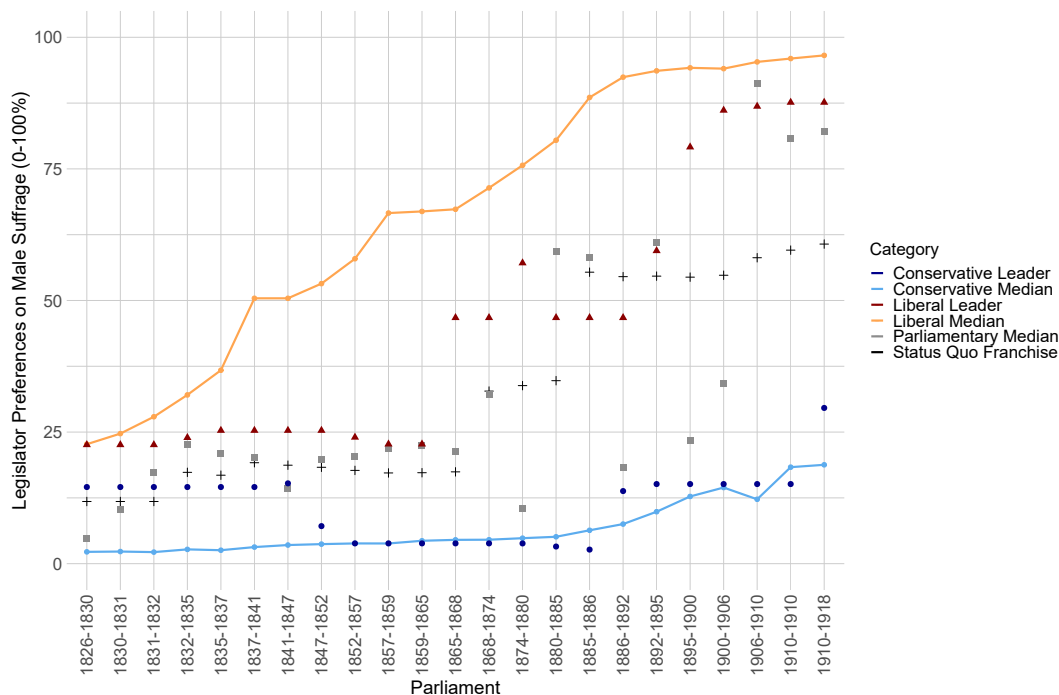
Note: Cell entries present coefficient estimates from OLS models of the party affiliation of elected MPs. Standard errors are clustered by parliamentary constituency.

## D Explaining the Timing of Franchise Reform

Actual legislation on electoral reform responded to changes in the positions taken by MPs in the House of Commons, as expressed over a multitude of parliamentary divisions on electoral matters. However, it arguably did so conditional on two main factors: the preferences of those able to determine the parliamentary agenda; and the introduction of other electoral items (such as redistricting, campaign finance, and so on) . Here we discuss the distribution of parliamentary preferences over the franchise in detail and we then reflect on how these preferences translated into policy.

Figure D.1 depicts the prevailing status quo franchise, the ideal points of the parliamentary median, the Liberal and Conservative medians, as well as the Liberal and Conservative party leaders. Notice that, except under Peel, the Conservative leadership coincides with the very restrictive views of the Conservative median. By contrast, the Whig/Liberal leaders (Russell, Palmerston, Gladstone, Cavendish, again Gladstone after 1874) were located below the Liberal median – with positions similar to Liberals in the bottom quartile of the Liberal distribution.

Figure D.1: Party Median vs. Leader Preferences on Male Suffrage



A stalled agenda in the 1850s and early 1860s.<sup>48</sup> The prevailing status quo in suffrage was correlated with the position of the median parliamentarian throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. While the 1826 and 1830 parliaments voted down any reform, the elections of 1831 triggered a Whig victory and, with it, the first electoral reform. With the exception of the 1832 and 1835 parliaments—where the median parliamentarian’s position was moderately more progressive than the status quo—up until the 1857 parliament, the preferences of the median parliamentarian roughly

<sup>48</sup>This account relies on Seymour (1915); Saunders (2011), alongside the debates and roll call data collected in Hansard .

coincided with the status quo franchise. After 1857 and until the Conservative victory of 1874, the median parliamentarian shifted to the left of the status quo. The Liberal victory of 1857 created a clear majority in favor of a broader franchise: the median parliamentarian now preferred a franchise including 21.9 percent of all men and the Liberal party median favored a franchise more than three times larger.

Still, it took three legislatures to pass the second reform of 1867, due to the role played by governing party leaders in setting the parliamentary agenda in interaction with the distribution of preferences within parties (and, in particular, within the Liberal party). The Conservative proposals of 1854 and 1859 offered marginal increases in the franchise while insisting on redistribution schemes that would have beefed up rural constituencies. In turn, Liberal leaders pushed for relatively moderate bills—until the middle of the 1860s. Palmerston, the Liberal party leader in the mid 1850s, had an estimated ideal male franchise just above 20 percent— an ideal point closer to the Whig faction than the median of his party. Unwilling to open Pandora’s box and the door to mass democracy, his 1852 proposal would have increased the male franchise by 2 percentage points. Palmerston’s pledge of 1857 was equally modest. John Russell’s bill of 1854 was slightly more expansive but fizzled due to the opposition of his own Liberal colleagues in government and of the Whig faction within the party.

Liberal proposals were not helped by what was a very heterogenous party. In the 1852-57 parliament, the Liberal MP in the 25th percentile (of the distribution of all Liberals) favored, according to our estimations, enfranchising one fourth of men. The Liberal MP in the 75th percentile supported a franchise close to 80 percent. Russell’s more generous bill of 1860 was voted down by Conservative and moderate Liberals.

Shifting preferences and strategic bundling in the mid 1860s. The House of Commons became more receptive to real franchise reform as Liberal parliamentarians moved to the left on franchise reform in the 1860s. Whereas the Liberal MP located in the 25th percentile of the Liberal party distribution on franchise preferences supported giving the right to vote to about 25 percent of men in 1852, an equally positioned Liberal MP favored enfranchising close to 60 percent of men by 1865 (Figure 4). After the 1865 election and the death of Palmerston, Gladstone introduced a bill proposing a broader franchise in March 1866. “Adullamite” MPs, a collection of Whigs and moderate Liberals that still held a pivotal position in Parliament, were dismayed at the possibility of enfranchising “working-class” voters to the point of jeopardizing “the very existence of the ‘moderate liberal majority’ ” (Saunders, 2011, p.203), demanding guarantees that the reform would protect their electoral position (mostly by minimizing any reduction in the representation of small boroughs). In late March 1866, Gladstone committed himself to solve the question of the problem of seat redistribution in a favorable manner while insisting, however, that that the House of Common passed his franchise proposal first. Without stronger guarantees, Adullamites quickly stopped supporting the government. In its Second Reading, on April 27, 1866, the bill passed on a razor-thin majority of 318 to 313 votes. In mid June, an amendment proposed by MP Dunkellin in favor of the government, was defeated by 315 to 304 votes. With the Liberal government in tatters, Derby proceeded to form a new Conservative government with the support of dissident Liberals.

Disraeli, Derby’s Chancellor, pushed for a Second Reform Bill on mostly strategic calculations. Even though the male franchise that, according to our estimations, Disraeli preferred was much lower than the one that resulted from the reform approved in 1867, the Conservative prime minister calculated that allowing Liberals to take the lead would have resulted in an electoral reform on terms

that could condemn the Tory party to be a permanent minority in the House of Commons. The continuous growth of urban Britain spilling into rural counties threatened the position of Conservative MPs. Moreover, with the Liberal party gravitating to the left on the issue, galvanized by the rising political figure of Gladstone and the entry of new, increasingly progressive MPs, the expansion of the franchise was unavoidable. As early as 1848, Disraeli had already declared that Tories should be in charge of a franchise expansion to “secure ‘an English and a national Government’” (Saunders, 2011, p.73).

The key to Disraeli’s success (in contrast to Gladstone’s failed bill) lied on his being able to tie both the extension of the franchise to the redistribution of seats together in a credible (and almost simultaneous) manner—mainly because he obtained Gladstone’s public promise that Liberals would not oppose redistricting in exchange for franchise expansion. Gladstone’s promise cleared the path to a final approval of the bill.

On the franchise question, Disraeli accepted the terms of the Gladstone reform and an even more expansive amendment put forward by Hodgkinson, a Radical MP, which Gladstone endorsed to overcome a divisive political debate on whether to the bill should employ rental versus rating mechanisms to determine the threshold to enfranchise borough taxpayers. Hodgkinson’s plan and the overall franchise reform, backed by most Liberals, either through tactical votes or abstention, shifted the status quo franchise to include about 30 percent of all men.<sup>49</sup> By passing an amplified version of Russell’s reform, Disraeli could prevent an even wider reform and, more crucially, attenuate the potential negative impact of a larger electorate on Tory candidates through three institutional reforms: the net reduction in the number of boroughs, which traditionally leaned toward Liberal candidates, to the benefit of county representation; a process of redistricting that packed urban voters, who naturally supported Liberal candidates, in boroughs, while adding new suburban voters to counties without jeopardizing the Conservative majority in the latter; and, the introduction of a so-called minority provision in three-member districts by limiting to two the number of ballots given to each elector—a solution that was strongly resented by Radicals because it facilitated Tory representation in urban settings (Seymour, 1915; Smith, 1966).

Several components of the final reform bill were agreed without a vote in the Commons, such as the Hodgkinson amendment, and even the third reading of 1867 Reform Bill took place without a parliamentary division. Thus, we cannot ascertain how popular these elements were with rank-and-file MPs from each party. Among all the votes on franchise-related divisions that took place between April 1866 (the second reading of Gladstone’s bill) and August 1867 (when MPs voted on amendments to the bill proposed by the House of Lords), the vast majority (over 80%) were party-line, with rank-and-file Conservative MPs typically continuing to vote almost unanimously against, and Liberal MPs almost unanimously for, further expansion of the male franchise. Of the franchise-related votes that received cross-party support, these largely dealt with issues that were peripheral to the reform bill, like measures to reduce electoral fraud, and one was in response to the amendment proposed by John Stuart Mill calling for female suffrage on the same terms as men. The pattern is even more consistent when we focus on key votes: across key votes on the male franchise from the period between 1861–67, fewer than 10% of MPs who voted rebelled against the majority

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<sup>49</sup>Even after accepting Hodgkinson’s amendment, Disraeli “laid upon the table of the House certain clauses containing new arrangements respecting compoundings” as “a mean of neutralising its effect” (Cox, 1868, pp.206–207). Whereas Hodgkinson had proposed to abolish the entire system in parliamentary boroughs, Disraeli moved to make the system operation conditional on the way landlords managed rents and tax payments system. However, Disraeli’s attempt “to render the suffrage a matter of arrangement between landlord and tenant failed” (ibid., p.208).

of their party (ref. Table D.1 below).

Strategic bundling (across legislative chambers) in 1884. Franchise reform and redistricting were also bundled together at some point during the discussion of the Third Electoral Reform. But their joint consideration responded to a different political and institutional logic than the 1867 deal. Whereas the latter was required to supersede the opposition of non-Liberal MPs in the Commons, the 1884 deal was struck to sway the House of Lords. Conservatives asked for the "redistribution of electoral power" (Seymour, 1915, p.469), that is, redistricting, to support Gladstone bill of 1884 in the House of Commons. Gladstone refused to negotiate any encompassing agreement that would include redistricting and defeated a Conservative amendment to stop the bill (April 7, 1884). It was only in the fall of 1884 that Gladstone agreed to implement some redistribution scheme (to be worked out in the future and that resulted in the Redistribution bill of 1885, approved after the franchise extension) to overcome a veto from the House of Lords.<sup>50</sup> More specifically, inter-party discussions that took place behind closed doors in November 1884, which resulted in the "Arlington Street Compact" (Jones, 1972; Hayes, 1982), led to the agreement that the bulk of MPs would henceforth be elected in single-member constituencies. This would, it was believed, benefit the Conservatives: by disaggregating large city-wide multi-member constituencies into smaller units, this clause ensured the emergence of a large number of suburban middle-class seats that the Tories could hope to win. However, these concessions do not appear to have been voted on in the Commons.

To sum up our discussion, party leaders' preferences and of inter-party bargaining mattered to determine the timing and final shape of key franchise reforms. Nonetheless—in line with our theoretical expectations and the partisan differences in franchise preferences that we estimate overall—when choosing how to vote while standing in the House of Commons, if voting, MPs still tended to vote almost entirely along partisan lines. This is confirmed by closer examination of key votes leading up to the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts. Table D.1 presents the partisan breakdown of these key votes, revealing that Conservative MPs who were present almost unanimously voted against, and Liberal MPs almost unanimously for, expansion of the male franchise in this period.

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<sup>50</sup>As (Seymour, 1915, p.470) write, "failing in the Commons, the Conservatives trusted to the Lords, who justified such confidence by refusing to pass the measure without sufficient guarantee of an immediate Redistribution Bill (...) It was not until the autumn of 1884, when the aroused temper of the masses and the inflexibility of the upper House threatened a crisis, that a compromise was arranged, and the constitutional revolution which took place twenty-seven years later, was avoided. The Conservatives agreed that the bill when reintroduced, should be allowed to pass, but only upon the understanding that a scheme of redistribution should be meanwhile presented. The bases of that scheme were to be arranged by the opposing leaders."

Table D.1: Partisan Breakdown of Key Votes on Male Suffrage, 1861-1884

| Date          | Notes  | % Cons. in Favor | % Lib. in Favor |
|---------------|--|------------------|-----------------|
| 13 March 1861 | Second reading of County Franchise Bill          | 4.1              | 93.5            |
| 10 April 1861 | Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill         | 2.2              | 89.6            |
| 13 April 1864 | Second reading of County Franchise Bill          | 3.0              | 94.8            |
| 11 May 1864   | Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill         | 1.5              | 92.3            |
| 27 April 1866 | Second reading of the Rep. of the People Bill    | 1.2              | 90.9            |
| 20 May 1867   | Lib. amendment to reduce copyhold franchise      | 8.2              | 97.0            |
| 8 August 1867 | Lords' amendment to retain prev. copyhold fr.    | 4.3              | 98.0            |
| 4 March 1879  | Motion to extend borough franchise to counties   | 0.7              | 97.5            |
| 7 April 1884  | Vote on cont'd debate on Rep. of the People Bill | 0.0              | 99.2            |