

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

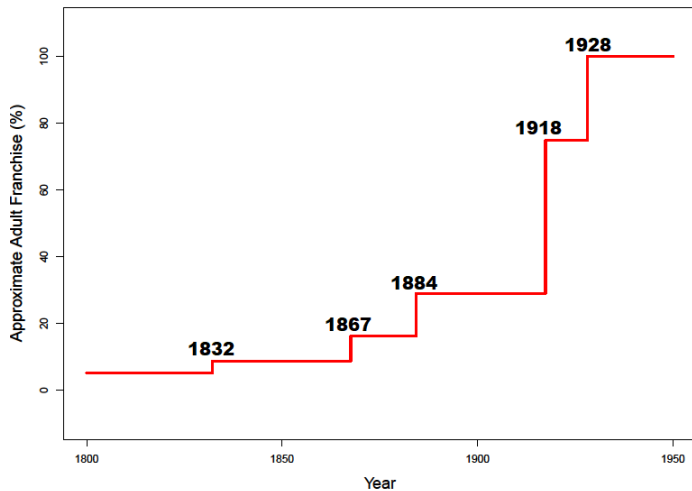
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# Democratization in Britain (1)



## Democratization in Britain (2)

- ▶ An incremental, largely peaceful and elite-managed process.
- ▶ Franchise roughly doubled every generation by new legislation (1832, 1867, 1884, 1918, 1928).
- ▶ Why did British elites willingly cede power to the masses?

## Theories of Democratization

1. Modernization reduced costs of democratization for elites (Boix 2003, Ansell and Samuels 2015).
2. Electoral calculations led (some) elites to favor liberalization (Lizzeri and Persicó 2004, Llavador and Oxoby 2005).
3. Threat of revolution (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, Aidt and Jensen 2014).
4. Compensation for participation in war (Tichhi and Vindigni 2010, Scheve and Stasavage 2016).

## Concerns and Solutions

- ▶ Many studies focus on single (favorable) instances of reform.
  - ▶ May overplay importance of elite choices relative to long-term structural factors.
  - ▶ Select on the dependent variable by ignoring instances of failed reform.
  - ▶ We study MPs' decisions to support (or oppose) franchise reform throughout the entire era.
- ▶ Assumptions about elite preferences are crucial but untested.
  - ▶ We use roll call data to estimate legislator preferences regarding the franchise.

## What We Do

- ▶ Use selected roll call votes to estimate British MP preferences over the size of the male franchise.
- ▶ Numerically interpret MP ideal points in terms of percentage enfranchised.
- ▶ Explore how MP preferences vary with party, parliament and constituency characteristics.

## What We Find (1)

(A) Britain's democratization process was partisan, not consensual:

- ▶ Persistent and widening partisan gulf on issue.
  - ▶ Libs overwhelmingly much more progressive than Cons.
  - ▶ Variation among Libs, little among Cons.
  - ▶ Gulf widens with time: growing Lib cohesion, Libs drift left.
  - ▶ Even in 1910, median Con would not back 1832 Reform Act!
- ▶ Parliamentary median generally became more progressive on the franchise issue over time.
  - ▶ Driven by Libs, not Cons.

## What We Find (2)

(B) The timing of reform was governed by two factors:

- ▶ Leftward drift of Lib MPs.
  - ▶ May be a result of wider socioeconomic trends.
- ▶ Position of Lib leader relative to status quo and Lib median.
  - ▶ Leader control of parliamentary agenda crucial to timing.



## Empirical Strategy (1)

Apply ideal point estimation to roll call data for 5,475 legislators between 1826 and 1918 (source: Eggers and Spirling).

- ▶ Model assumes legislator has an ideal point on a scale ranging from 0%–100% enfranchised.
- ▶ More likely to vote for a bill which moves policy closer to ideal point.

But, MP ideal points are not necessarily comparable across time.

- ▶ If content of parliamentary agenda is changing.
- ▶ If nature and scope of partisan disagreement on an issue is changing.

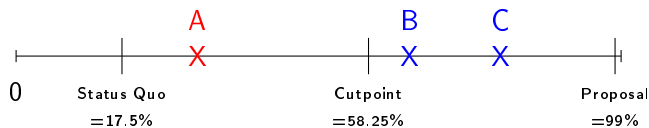
## Empirical Strategy (2)

Solution: adapt approach suggested by Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017).

1. Restrict attention to the 325 votes on franchise reform between 1826 and 1918.
2. Identify 25 key votes:
  - ▶ Plausibly non-strategic.
  - ▶ Easy to calculate implied male franchise if vote is successful.
3. Locate key votes relative to each other and to status quo.
4. Infer MP decisions on votes occurring when an MP may not have been serving.

# Imputation Procedure

## Chartist Petition of 1839



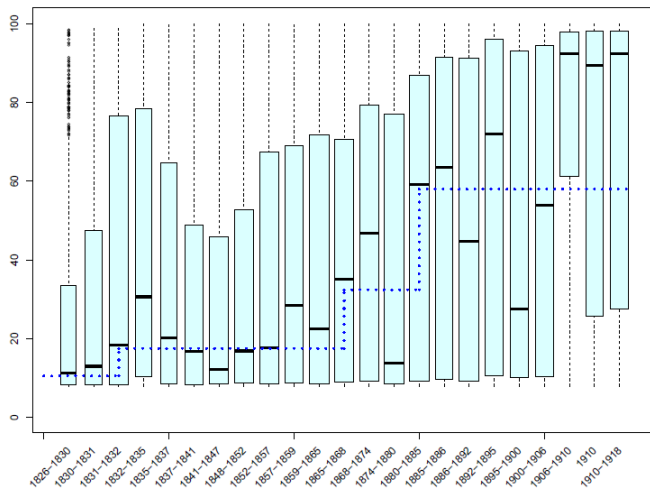
## March 1909 Motion



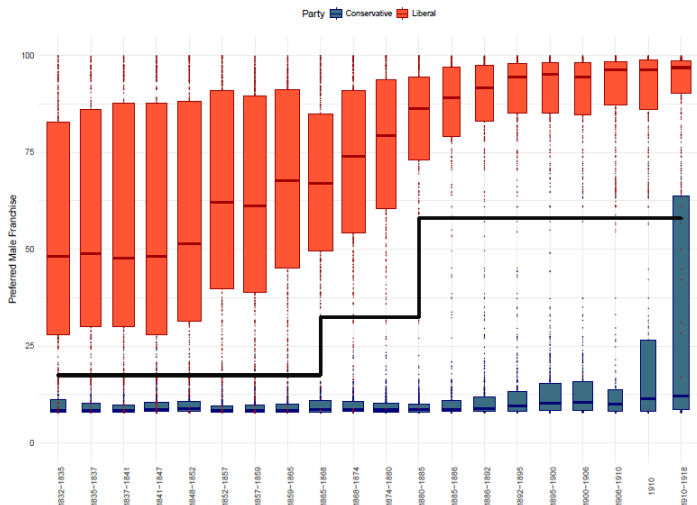
## Empirical Strategy (3)

- ▶ Construct augmented matrix of votes on franchise reform.
- ▶ Use a Bayesian approach to estimate legislator ideal points (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers 2000).
  - ▶ Estimates based on a weighted average of each legislator's votes.
- ▶ Generate predicted values for franchise preferred by each legislator.
  - ▶ Bayesian procedure estimates ideal points on  $(-2.5, 2.5)$  interval.
  - ▶ Estimate non-linear mapping from ideal points to preferred franchise using bill content and estimated bill locations.

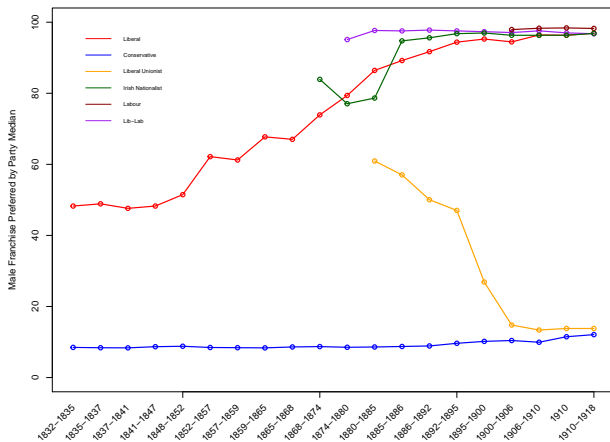
# MP Preferences over the Male Franchise, 1826–1918



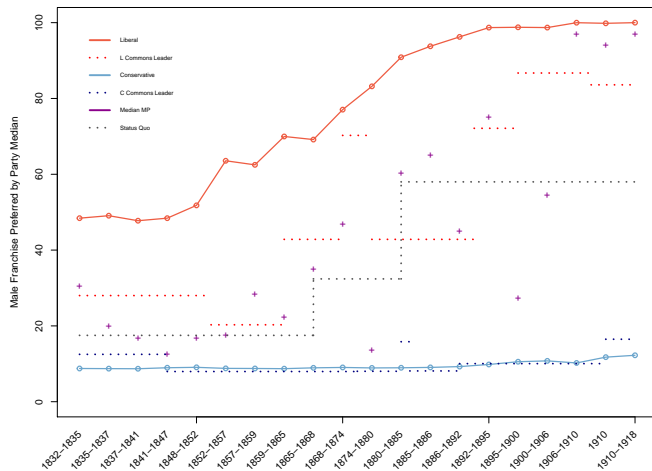
# Major Party Preferences on Franchise Reform



# Trends in Party Median Preferences

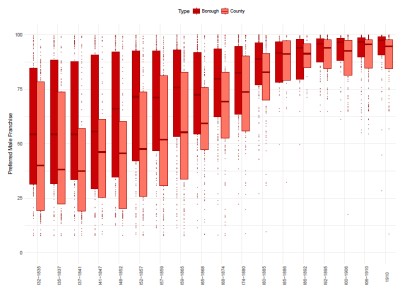


# Why Did Reform Then Take So Long?

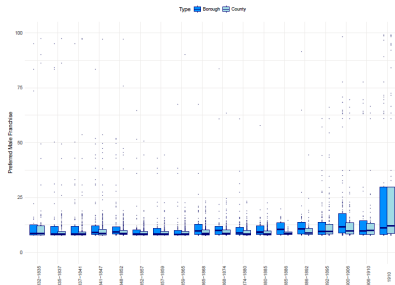




# Explaining Variation in MP Preferences

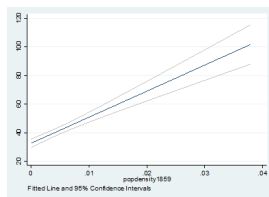


(a) Liberal MPs

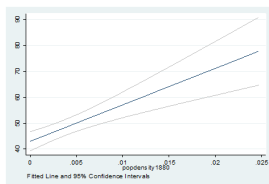


(b) Conservative MPs

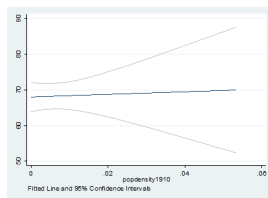
## Next Steps?



(a) Parliament of  
1859–1865



(b) Parliament of  
1880–1885



(c) Parliament of 1910

## Conclusion

- ▶ Estimate latent preferences of British MPs on the size of the male franchise between 1826 and 1918.
- ▶ Results suggest that:
  - ▶ Britain's democratization was a partisan enterprise.
  - ▶ Timing of reform governed by two factors.
    1. Leftward drift of Lib MPs.
    2. Position of Lib leader relative to status quo and Lib median.
- ▶ Some evidence for modernization theories of democratization.
  - ▶ Political competition between urban and rural elites?
- ▶ Little support for theories based on revolutionary threat, war.