

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

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August 31, 2019

## Democratization in Britain

- ▶ 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 broader electorate?

## Existing Work

- ▶ Most studies: cross-country over-time data.
- ▶ Assumptions about elite preferences generally untested.
- ▶ Many studies focus on single (favorable) instances of reform.
  - ▶ Select on the dependent variable by ignoring different environments leading to reform:
    - ▶ 1832 (Almond et al. 1973, Aidt & Franck 2013, Aidt & Jensen 2014) vs. 1884.
  - ▶ And/or ignoring instances of failed reform:
    - ▶ 1867 (Lizzeri & Persico 2004, Bronner 2014) vs. failed reforms in 1840s, 1860s.
  - ▶ May overplay importance of elite choices relative to long-term structural factors.

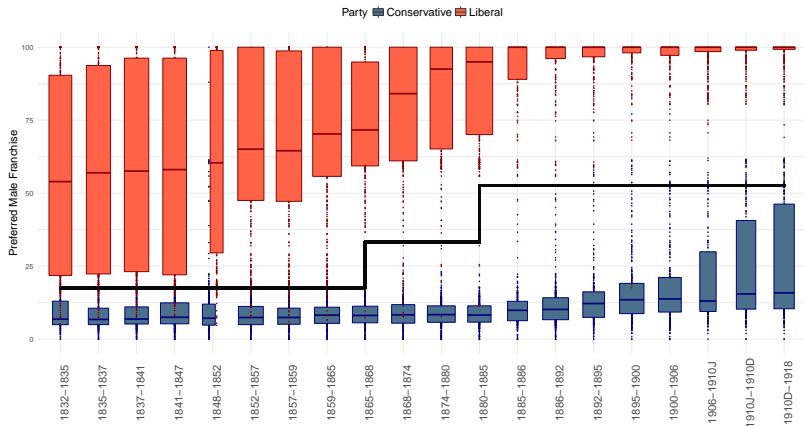
## What We Do

- ▶ Study MP decisions to support (or oppose) franchise reform throughout the entire era.
  - ▶ Use roll call data to estimate British MP preferences regarding the male franchise (1826–1918) and female franchise (1867–1928).
  - ▶ Numerically interpret MP ideal points in terms of percentage enfranchised.
- ▶ Explore how MP preferences vary with party, parliament and constituency characteristics.

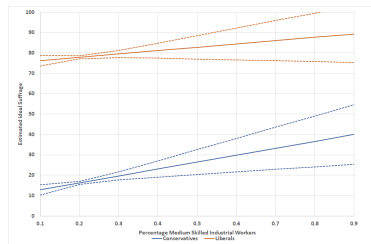
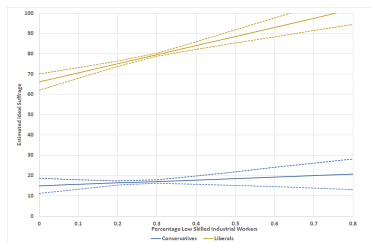
## How We Do It

- ▶ Apply ideal point estimation to roll call data for 5,495 legislators between 1830 and 1918 (source: Eggers and Spirling [extended]).
- ▶ Adapt approach suggested by Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017) to improve intertemporal comparability of estimates.
  - ▶ Restrict attention to the 325 votes on franchise reform between 1830 and 1918.
  - ▶ Use 34 key votes to infer MP decisions on votes where they were not present.
    - ▶ 16 key votes for female suffrage.
  - ▶ Apply Bayesian approach to augmented matrix to estimate ideal points.
  - ▶ Generate predicted values for franchise preferred by each legislator.

# Democratization Was Partisan, Not Consensual

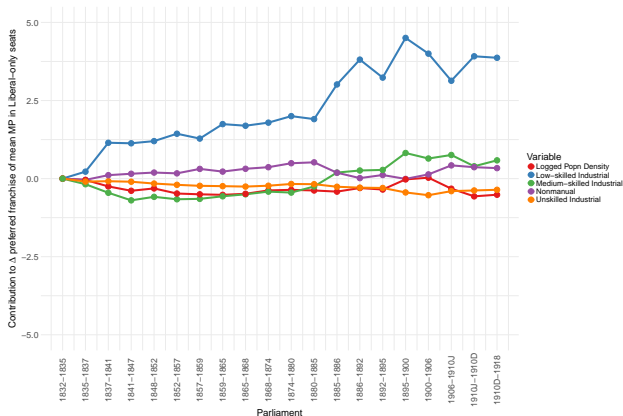


## ...Related to Broader Socioeconomic Trends



- ▶ Liberal MPs in constituencies with more low-skilled industrial workers esp more pro-franchise.
- ▶ ...controlling for prop. in other sectors, peers, officeholders, population density, religion, constituency and time FEs.

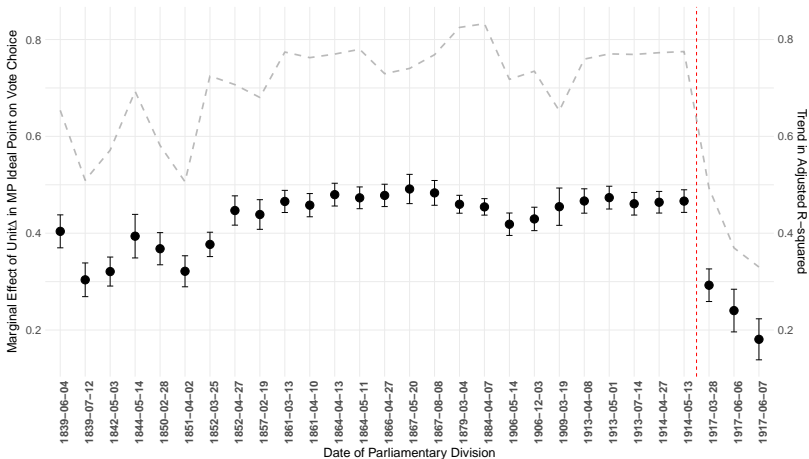
# Explanatory Power of Individual Structural Factors



- ▶ Single most important structural factor: the process of turning peasants into the proletariat.



# The Impact of WW1



## Other Results

- ▶ MP preferences regarding female suffrage displays similar patterns (e.g. partisan gulf that shrinks over time).
- ▶ Why did reform take so long?
  - ▶ Whig/liberal leaders typically favored (much) more restrictive franchise than the bulk of their party.

## Conclusion

- ▶ Estimate latent preferences of British MPs regarding the franchise between 1826 and 1918.
- ▶ Results suggest that:
  - ▶ Britain's democratization a partisan enterprise, with timing of reform governed by gradual pro-franchise drift of Liberal MPs.
  - ▶ Structural changes important: income growth, class structure, urbanization.
  - ▶ WW1 appears impt for 'democratizing' the Tories.

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