



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

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Abstract

Between 1832 and 1918, a set of gradual reforms broadened the franchise in Great Britain from less than 5% of all adult males before 1832 to universal male suffrage in 1918. Why did the political class in Britain willingly cede power to the masses rather than seeking to preserve the status quo? We revisit this question by studying how elite preferences regarding the scope of democracy changed over the course of this period. We use roll call votes on franchise reform in the House of Commons between 1830 and 1928 to estimate the preferences of MPs regarding the size of the franchise. We follow Bateman et al. (2017) in using an adapted ideal point estimation procedure which uses information on the policy content of key votes to improve the intertemporal comparability of our estimates. Our results imply three main conclusions. First, the process of democratization in Britain was partisan rather than consensual: although the median MP generally came to support a more generous franchise with time, conservative MPs were almost united throughout in opposing almost any suffrage extension. Second, the pace of electoral reform was governed by two factors: the gradual leftward drift of Liberal MPs, which accelerated from the mid-19th century onwards, and the conservatism of early Liberal leaders. Our analyses suggest that the process of social and economic modernization in Britain may explain much of the variation in legislator preferences we observe.

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In the last decades, the research program on the causes of democratization has progressively converged around two main strategies of inquiry. On the one hand, it has developed a set of theoretical models connecting a given number of political agents (such as the wealthy, the poor, softliners, hardliners, radicals, moderates, and so on) to a set of preferences (over political regimes) and beliefs to predict the conditions under which democracy may prevail. On the other hand, it has moved from case studies and crude cross-sectional analysis (Lipset (1959), Moore (1966)) to relying on full panel data sets (see, among a vast literature, Przeworski (2009), Boix (2011), Treisman (2015) and Miller (2016)). Overall, there has been cumulative progress in the last decades on the causes of democratic transitions and democratic consolidation (Geddes, 2007; Treisman, 2017). Still, the literature suffers from an arguably important limitation: little effort has been made so far to link those two strands of research, that is, to validate, in an empirically systematic manner, the number and nature of political agents (defined in the existing literature) as well as to map out their preferences and beliefs regarding the choice of political institutions.¹

In this paper, we employ Britain’s long march to democracy as a way to flesh out theoretically and test empirically the “microfoundations” of democratization models. Britain, which Robert Dahl famously cast as an example of a development path successfully leading, through the balanced expansion of liberalization and participation, from a “closed hegemony” to a “polyarchy” (Dahl, 1971), went through a set of gradual reforms to broaden its franchise over the course of a full century. The proportion of individuals with the right to vote roughly doubled with every new generation – from around 10 percent of all adult males to 17.5 percent in 1832, then to 33 percent in 1867, over 50 percent in 1884, and universal (male) suffrage in 1918. Full universal suffrage came with the final reform of 1928 granting the right to vote to women under 30. The process of political

¹For a classical defense of a modeling strategy that, at least provisionally, relies on “mistaken” (or, perhaps more convincingly, untested) assumptions, see Friedman (1953).

liberalization was not limited to the expansion of the franchise but also accompanied by equally fundamental reforms to get rid of rotten boroughs, suppress the sale of votes, secure the secrecy of the ballot, and so on.

Explaining why British ruling elites willingly decided to share power with the whole population has been the object of an extensive and contested academic debate – which has been part of a broader, vibrant and long debate on the causes of democratization. Barrington Moore (1966) traced Britain’s peaceful transition to liberal democracy back to the 16th-century commercial revolution and the assertion of parliamentary institutions in the 17th century, which established the foundations for the rise of a British bourgeoisie and its progressive integration with the old aristocracy. Following Moore’s path-breaking study, Britain’s democratization and the behavior of its political elites have been the object of a set of influential case studies. Almond, Flanagan and Mundt (1973) reconstructed the historical development of the electoral reform of 1832 by examining the evolution of roll-call votes in the House of Commons. Aidt and Franck (2013) explored the same question quantitatively, examining the social and economic covariates of parliamentary votes and linking the analysis to recent work on the relationship between democracy and redistribution (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). Studying the reform of 1867, Lizzeri and Persicò (2004) and Bronner (2014) attribute political liberalization to pure electoral calculations – with conservatives and liberals competing with each other to attract new segments of voters.²

Although these studies get closer to the analysis of the microfoundations of the process of democratization, they suffer from several methodological flaws – mainly because they focus on one particular moment, single decision or isolated reform. In the first place, they select on the dependent variable, mainly examining instances of franchise expansion and ignoring preceding moments in which very similar political reforms failed. Indeed, the

²Although very different in its philosophy and execution, Treisman’s (2017) paper also examines historical processes – in his case to assess where elites introduced democracy deliberately or “by mistake”. Mares and Queralt (2015) model, in turn, the vote over the income tax in Britain in 1842.

first electoral reform of 1832 took place after parliament rejected several democratization plans from the mid 1820s to as late as 1831. Likewise, the second electoral reform of 1867 brought to completion enfranchisement projects that had been rejected less than a decade before. In the second place, their exclusive focus on single instances of political reform results in omitted variable bias. Take, for example, the problem of whether popular agitation and revolutionary threats preceded democratization spells or not. Aidt and Jensen (2014) conclude that the presence of Swing riots in 1830 and 1831 induced voters to choose pro-reform candidates, leading to the decision of British parliamentarians to widen the franchise in 1832. However, one can equally point to instances in which strong popular mobilization resulted in no reforms (the Chartist petitions of the 1840s, signed by hundreds of thousands of individuals) or when reforms succeeded without much popular pressure (as in 1884).

This general lack of comparability in the current literature on British democratization makes it difficult to offer any systematic insights on the causes underlying the overall democratization process in Britain and how it may relate to the process of social and economic modernization – probably overplaying the autonomous role of political elites. Moreover, it may lead us to misinterpret the motivations of politicians when extending the franchise. For example, some of these studies conclude that growing party competition prompted liberal and conservative politicians to expand the franchise to mobilize new voters in the expectation that the latter would then vote for the reform-minded politician that had extended the franchise to include them. Yet they forget that by expanding the electorate, politicians also risked alienating the support of already enfranchised citizens, and that political elites would only accept new voters to the extent that the preferences of these voters would not be too costly in policy terms or, more precisely, that the costs of including these voters would be lower than the costs of keeping them out of the ballot box – something that may depend on the heterogeneity of preferences, degree of mobilization,

etc. of both enfranchised and unenfranchised citizens.

In short, a research design that deals with one reform at a time cannot credibly examine all those questions. Instead, one needs to compare the preferences and strategies of political actors during instances of reform with moments when there were none. In this paper, we tackle this problem by measuring the nature of elite (revealed) preferences toward democracy and then determining how they related, in interaction with Britain's social and economic modernization, to the expansion of democratic institutions in Britain.³

With those goals in mind, we perform the following tasks. In the first place, we map out the evolution of political elite preferences in Britain toward the male franchise from 1830 to 1918, employing information on how the members of the House of Commons (MPs) voted on electoral issues from 1830, that is, two years before the first electoral reform, to the fourth electoral reform (1918) which introduced universal male and partial female suffrage. We also consider, in separate estimations, the preferences toward the female franchise from 1867 (the first time the House of Commons voted on the issue) until 1928. To that effect, we reconstruct, with the aid of well-established ideal point estimation techniques that measure and model roll-call votes (McCarty, 2010), the level of polarization of the House of Commons on this issue as well as the policy location of all MPs. Following the contribution of Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017), who show that current methods employed to characterize elite ideological differences that do not account for the policy content of roll-call votes distort our analysis and representation of the underlying policy space(s), we use actual information about the real or potential franchise effects of reform proposals to anchor roll call votes in a fixed policy space (defined by an enfranchised male population from 0 to 100 percent), and construct an augmented

³Our work is related to two recent lines of research that also trying to assess the underlying structure of interests towards democracy. Svobik (2017) has designed a battery of survey experiments to evaluate the true attachment of non-elites to democratization. Fresh (2018) has matched a panel of British parliamentarians with economic variables over a period of two centuries to analyze the impact of industrialization on elite turnover and the presence of political dynasties.

matrix of roll-call votes which includes how (some) elites would have voted in votes in which they did not actually participate. Notice that, improving on Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017), we use real measures (of the impact of reforms on the franchise) to determine the location of the status quo and alternative proposals in the policy space. In the second place, we connect the evolution of the parliamentarians' ideal points to their personal characteristics and to Britain's process of economic development and changing social structure – such as weight of landed interests or size of different occupational classes.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 offers a theoretical discussion to fix our empirical expectations about the political agents involved and their preferences toward democratization. Section 2 describes the methods we have employed to construct the distribution of ideal points (on democratization) of British parliamentarians – including a comparison with ideal point estimation models that do not constrain preferences according to substantive information (i.e. the actual content of the examined roll calls). Section 3 presents our general results and finds that policy positions shifted to the left gradually but that the timing of that transformation was strongly related to internal partisan changes. It also shows that the passage of actual reforms was often dictated by the configuration of agenda-setting powers: that is, although the process of political liberalization depended on fundamental underlying factors (for example, the replacement of a Whig parliamentary party by a true liberal party), its timing was often determined by the preferences of party leaders. Section 4 explores the covariates of parliamentary preferences, and, in particular, the implications of economic and social conditions, as determined by the process of industrialization: parliamentarians held more progressive views in districts with a sizable contingent of affluent industrial workers and more reactionary views in agricultural constituencies with many unskilled laborers. Section 5 explores the impact of broad war mobilization, showing how a substantial part of the

conservative party, extremely reluctant to expanding the right to vote, switched to support male universal suffrage in exchange for universal conscription during World War One (Tichhi and Vindigni, 2010; Scheve and Stasavage, 2016). Section 6 concludes by linking our results to the broad literature on democratization.

1 Theory

A recent and growing literature explains democratic stability as a political equilibrium in which political actors accept fair and competitive elections because the expected policy losses from shifting to (more) democracy and losing control over government with some non-negative probability (losses that Robert Dahl referred to as “costs of toleration” in his seminal book *Polyarchy*) are smaller than the “costs of repression” incurred to maintain a restrictive franchise (Dahl, 1971; Przeworski, 1991; Weingast, 1997; Boix, 2003; Ansell and Samuels, 2014).

A simple way to develop that general insight for the purposes of this paper (and its exploration of Britain’s evolution from a system with an extremely restrictive franchise to one with full universal suffrage) would be as follows. Consider a parliament initially elected by a very narrow electorate (making the legislature tantamount to a “committee of landlords”, to use Barrington Moore’s expression, plus some urban and commercial interests). Politics is played on a single policy dimension that stretches from right to left – and that is broadly correlated with income (and social status). Initially, only high-income voters (placed to the right of the policy space) have the right to vote. In each electoral district, there are (at most) two competing candidates, who, for the sake of the analysis, can be labeled as Liberal and Conservative, and who place themselves to the left and right of the district’s median voter (according to a standard partial-convergence Downsian model of electoral competition). Legislators (and candidates) may move in the policy space but, due to credibility constraints and the costs of campaigning, only at a

slow pace.

When confronted with the choice of expanding the franchise, the incentives of Liberal and Conservative legislators will differ as follows. Assuming that moving along the policy space is costly, Conservative legislators will oppose the expansion of the franchise for two reasons – the first electoral, the second one, redistributive. In the first place, they will find hard to attract newly enfranchised voters, who are placed to the left in the policy space. In principle, and unless Conservatives can generate new issues or dimensions of competition, new voters will be more likely to vote for Liberal candidates. In the second place, an expansion of the franchise implies a shift of the median voter and therefore of the average policy to the left – away from the preferences of conservative voters. Hence, Conservative legislators will resist any franchise expansion – the more strongly, the sharper the difference between the status quo policy and the policy linked to the new franchise and, therefore, the higher the costs imposed on their traditional voters.

The preferences of Liberal legislators towards an expansion of the franchise will be, on average, more progressive than those of Conservative parliamentarians. But they will be also shaped by the same electoral and redistributive concerns that affected the position of Conservatives. Liberal legislators expect to benefit from the vote of new electors, who, again, are placed to the left of the electoral space – provided Conservatives do not attract them on the basis of new issues or that no third parties compete for those new voters.⁴ However, they will weigh the potential increase of new (left) voters against the loss of their traditional liberal electorate. The extent of that loss will be determined by the redistributive impact (across voters) of franchise expansion. Liberal support for franchise expansion will rise when the additional costs of the new policy (in the form of higher taxes, tariffs, regulation and soon) are moderate or low. That redistributive impact will be, in turn, a function of the three following factors: the distribution of income, the

⁴Notice that the latter condition predicts that liberal legislators will favor franchise expansion to happen gradually – unless they can count on a strong mass party organization to absorb a sudden increase in the electorate.

nature of wealth, and the level of average income.⁵

In a standard political economy model, where taxes are set by the median voter and where taxes are higher the more right-skewed the income distribution (among enfranchised individuals), support for more democracy will rise as the income differences between the pre-electoral reform and post-electoral reform median voter decline. Hence, lower levels of inequality and the expansion of middle strata or of an affluent working class should make liberal legislators more prone to suffrage expansion. Second, support for democratization will also be higher among legislators representing constituencies with low levels of landed (or fixed) wealth because expanding the franchise to poor voters there may be less threatening. Non-fixed or mobile wealth can be less easily taxed than land and other specific assets for at least two reasons: the owners of mobile assets can threaten to leave under high taxes; land assets are easier to measure (and therefore tax) than other types of wealth. Finally, democratization is more likely to happen when overall income rises. Assume that the marginal utility of additional income declines with income: rich voters will oppose any meaningful expansion of the franchise (and a corresponding increase in taxes) in poor countries: however, they will become increasingly indifferent to higher taxes when their per capita income increases.⁶ Notice that the same kinds of redistributive calculations apply to conservatives: a more homogeneous social structure (and income distribution), a decline in the weight of landed wealth, and higher incomes should raise their preferences for a wider franchise. However, the overall (net) effect should be much lower than for liberals due to their strict electoral calculations as discussed above.⁷

⁵The following discussion relies on Boix (2003), chapters 1 and 4. However, the model here replaces social and economic agents with political representatives and considers the additional problem of calculating the strict electoral consequences of expanding the franchise.

⁶For the declining utility of additional income to lead to democratization, the (welfare effects of the) costs of exclusion should not decrease at the same rate. This happens if a higher income among low-income voters raises their ability to resist political exclusion through a convex function. In this plausible scenario, for example, poor individuals earning a subsistence wage can hardly spare time and effort to organize collectively but they do when they become more productive.

⁷So far, we have considered the preferences of parliamentarians representing a similar type of con-

2 Mapping Legislator Ideal Points

To explain why certain members of the British elite acquiesced to expand the franchise at particular historical junctures, we first use parliamentary votes on franchise reform to estimate each British legislator’s latent preferences over the percentage of adult men to be enfranchised. To do so, we rely on the ideal point estimation procedure proposed by Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017), which incorporates information about the policy content of different roll call votes to enable the interpretation of ideal points in terms of support or opposition to specific policy proposals.

Ideal point estimation techniques combine information from legislators’ observed roll call votes with a spatial voting logic in order to estimate the ideological preferences of legislators on one or more latent dimensions. Therefore, as in spatial models of voting, ideal point estimators assume that legislators have preferences defined over policy alternatives that can be represented as points in a Cartesian policy space and that their preference function is single-peaked and symmetric. In addition, legislators vote sincerely, making voting errors infrequently. Thus, when choosing between two alternatives, a legislator will tend to vote for the policy alternative closest to his ideal point (or most preferred policy). Beyond their commitment to this general framework, extant ideal point estimators vary considerably in, for instance, the assumptions they make about the functional form of legislators’ utility functions, or the distribution of voting errors (Poole, 2000; Poole and Rosenthal, 2011; Clinton, Jackman and Rivers, 2004).

stituency. In a more complex set-up, one may consider a set of heterogeneous districts, differing in terms of average income and internal distribution of income. Provided that tax policy is fully nationalized, the representatives of richer districts will be more opposed to the extension of the franchise than the parliamentarians of poorer districts, particularly if candidates are located around each district’s median voter. In addition to the purely redistributive effect, there is an electoral effect that may affect preferences in the opposite direction. Lowering the income threshold to vote may hardly affect electoral politics in a wealthy district: almost all electors may be enfranchised before this reform and candidates may be located around the median voter of the full electorate. By contrast, in a poor district, an expansion of the franchise to low-income voters will mostly affect the Conservative candidate, who, in our model, represents rich voters. Hence, he will have a strong incentive to oppose the franchise reform even though its district will not be affected from a tax, redistributive point of view.

Although many studies have used ideal point estimates to make inferences about long-run trends in elite preferences and behavior (e.g. McCarty et al. 2016 on polarization in America), over-time comparisons of this nature assume that the cardinal interpretation of the estimates does not change over time (i.e. a legislator with an ideal point of 1 in 2000 is twice as extreme as a legislator with an ideal point of 0.5 in 1950). However, ideal point estimates from different eras may not be directly comparable under two circumstances: first, when legislator behavior is influenced by partisanship and the extent of policy disagreement between parties on an issue changes over time; and, second, when the content of the legislative agenda changes substantially over time. Neither of these concerns are resolved by standard fixes for improving the overtime comparability of ideal point estimates—such as using bridging legislators or allowing for a linear trend in legislator ideal points (as in DW-NOMINATE).

In response to these concerns, Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017) suggest two additional steps to improve the intertemporal comparability of ideal point estimates: 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 may not have been serving. This second step effectively increases the number of bridging legislators very substantively, improving the accuracy with which policy spaces in different eras are bridged. Looking at the evolution of legislator preferences on civil rights since 1877, Bateman et al. show that their approach shrinks the standard estimate of current polarization in the US House of Representatives (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2016) by almost one half. When Social Security is considered instead, the estimated level of polarization falls by about a third.

To apply this procedure to our case, we restrict attention to votes on bills and motions between 1826 and 1918 that dealt with male franchise reform (and 1867 to 1928 for the female vote). Relying on the dataset compiled by Eggers and Spirling (2014), we identify

325 such votes in this period. From these votes, we select 34 votes for the imputation procedure (and 16 for the female franchise). 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 combined historical census data, information from relevant parliamentary debates in Hansard and historical commentary on the implications of each vote (Seymour, 1915; Saunders, 2011).

Notice that 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 clarify 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.

Consistent with a spatial voting logic, we assume that legislators have Euclidean preferences over differing franchises and that their voting decisions on these votes reflect their sincere preferences on the issue. For each vote, we assume that the cutpoint dividing

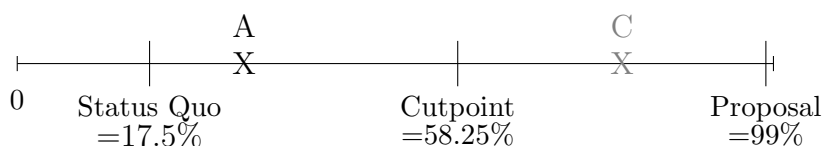
Yea and Nay votes is located at the midpoint between the proportion of individuals enfranchised by the vote and the status quo franchise. That is, legislators voting Yea prefer some franchise above the cutpoint, and legislators voting Nay prefer some franchise below the cutpoint. For instance, consider 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 legal male franchise after the 1832 reform was 17.5%. 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 58.25%. Therefore, those who supported this motion ideally preferred a franchise greater than 58.25%, whereas those who opposed this motion ideally preferred a franchise of less than 58.25%. We then apply these assumptions to reconstruct the hypothetical behavior of those legislators (for whom we have information about their behavior in 1839) in other parliamentary votes taking place in legislatures in which they may not have present.

This logic of this procedure is illustrated with the help of Figure 1, which plots the status quo, proposal and cutpoint for two votes on electoral reform in the House of Commons: the Chartist petition of 1839 and the motion voted eighty years later. The upper plot displays the status quo (resulting from the electoral reform of 1832 and enfranchising 17.5 percent of adult males) and the franchise that would have resulted had the Chartist petition of 1839 prospered. According to our assumptions about symmetrically distributed preferences, the cutpoint dividing positive and negative votes would be at 58.25 percent. The lower plot graphs the status quo (from the third electoral reform of 1884) and the potential franchise linked to the motion voted by the House of Commons to introduce male universal franchise. In this case, the cutpoint dividing the chamber would have been at 75.8 percent. Figure 1 also plots the approximate ideal points (unknown to us) of three legislators *A*, *B* and *C* in the franchise policy space. Legislator *A* voted against the petition of 1839. In turn, legislator *B* and *C* voted against and in favor of

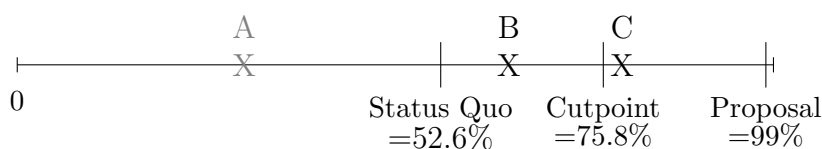
the 1909 motion respectively. *A*'s ideal point is to the left of the 1839 cutpoint and, therefore, to the left of the 1909 cutpoint as well: we can then assume that, had *A* been present in the latter vote, he would have voted against it too. *C*'s ideal point lies to the right of the 1909 cutpoint and, by implication, to the right of the 1839 cutpoint: had he been present in the Chartist petition roll-call, he would have voted in favor. Thus, we can deploy this logic to extrapolate the behavior of members of parliament in different legislatures – and making the latter comparable within the same policy frame. Notice that, by contrast, we cannot extrapolate *B*'s vote to 1839: although his negative vote places him to the left of the 1909 cutpoint, we have no way to determine whether he voted against as a moderate (with an ideal point between the two cutpoints) or as a reactionary with preferences similar to *A*.

Figure 1: Illustrative Example

Chartist Petition of 1839



March 1909 Motion



We extend the 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.⁸ For votes which proposed franchise expansion, we infer that

⁸For votes at committee stage or on amendments, the 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 32.25% (the franchise if the amendment was upheld) rather than 17.5% (the approximate legal male franchise

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 would also oppose franchise expansion measures with lower cutpoints, and support franchise reduction measures with higher cutpoints.⁹ However, legislators voting Nay would support franchise expansion and oppose franchise reduction measures with lower cutpoints. In the appendix, we list the 34 votes selected for the imputation procedure for the male franchise, the 16 votes selected for the female 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.

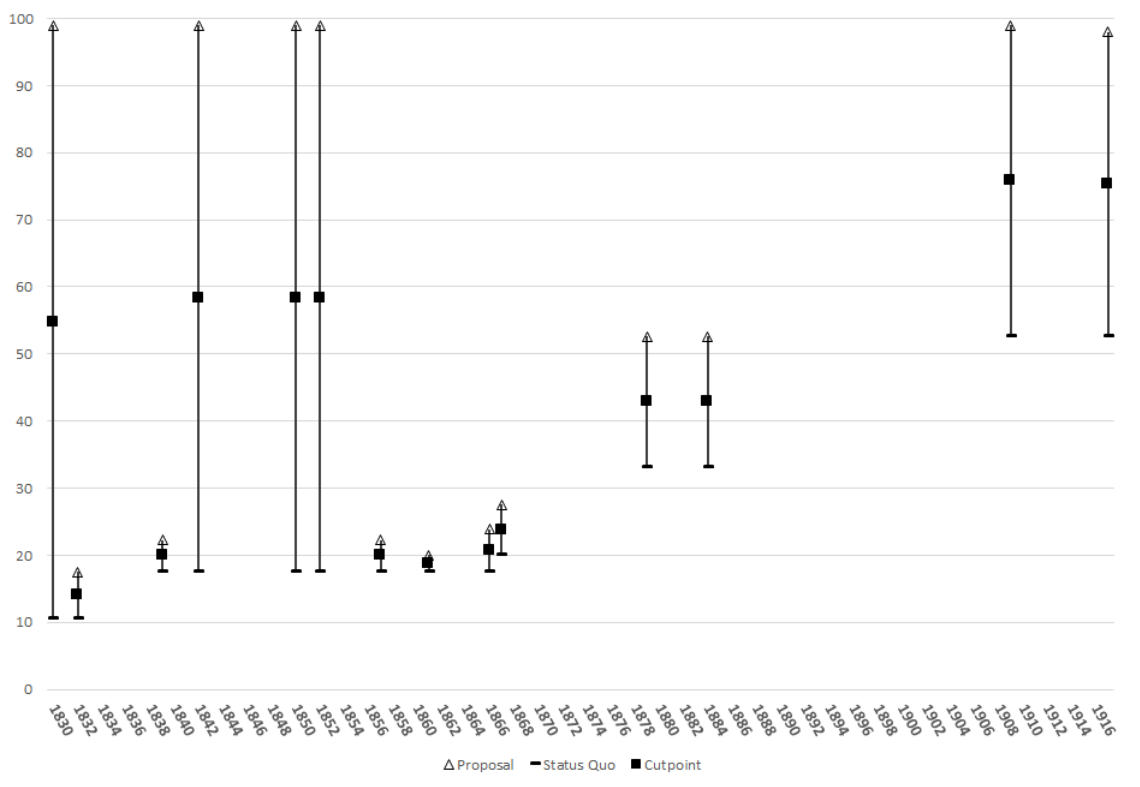
As in Bateman et al. (2017), legislator ideal points are assumed to be fixed over time, and so any changes in the distribution of preferences are driven by replacement rather than changes in individual preferences. Also following Bateman et al., we use a Bayesian item response theory (IRT) model to estimate legislator ideal points. Finally, we do not impute votes for a franchise (i.e., male or female) for the small number of legislators whose voting behavior on key votes for that franchise was inconsistent with the logic outlined above (though we do still estimate their ideal points on the basis of their actual votes).¹⁰

following the 1832 reform).

⁹Of 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.

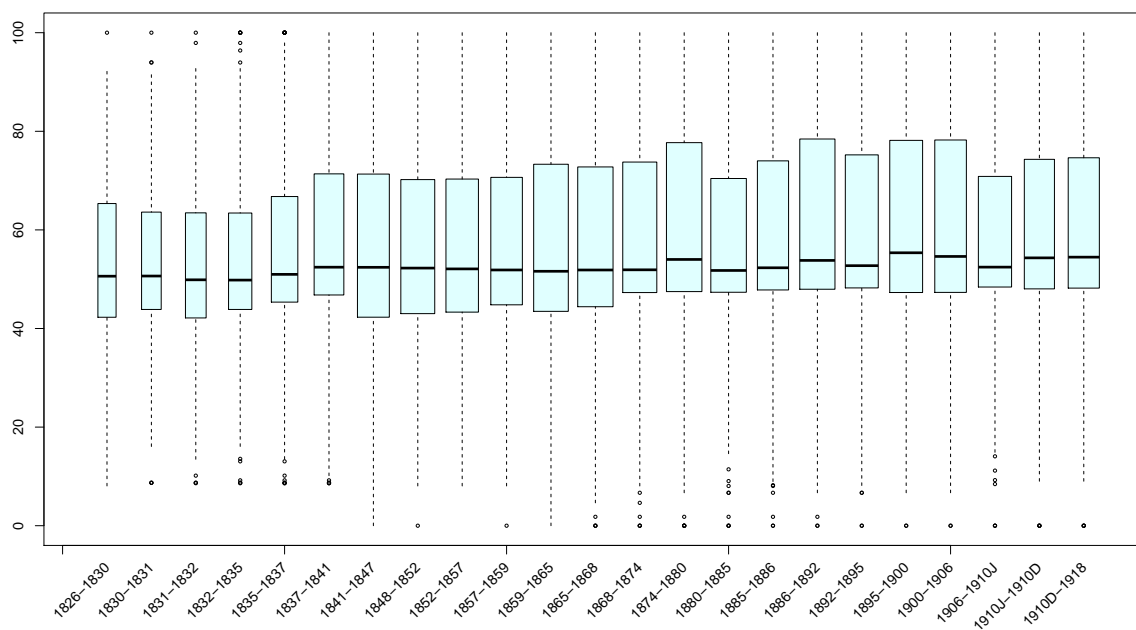
¹⁰Of the 5,495 legislators whose decisions we analyze, only 348 legislators – 6.3% of the total – voted inconsistently on at least one of these key votes. We do not impute the behavior of these legislators on

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



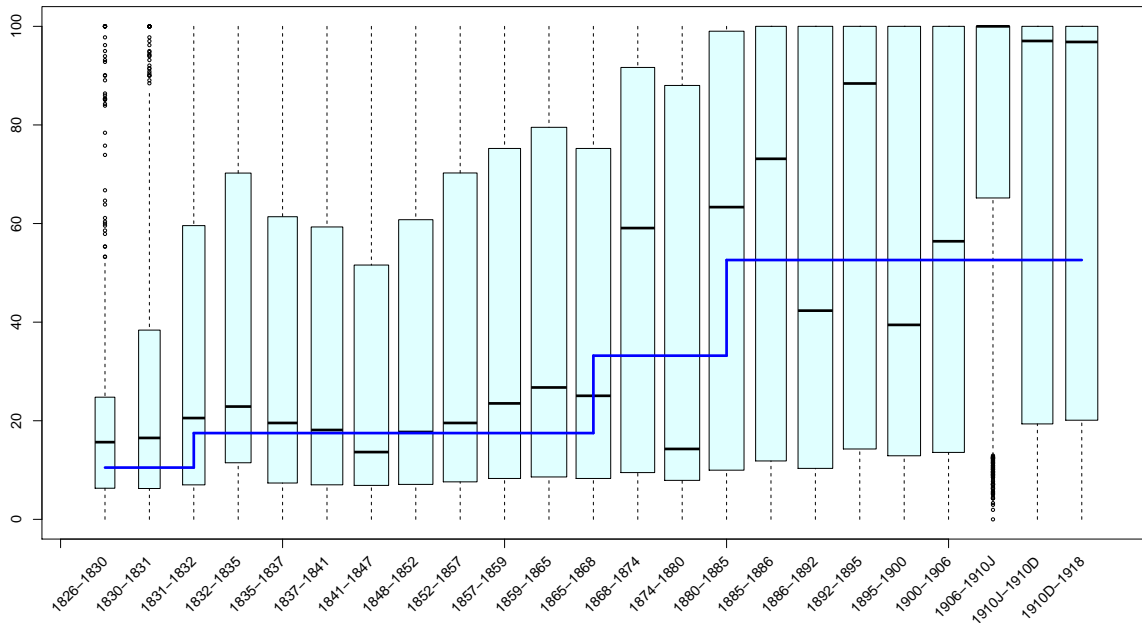
To aid interpretation, we generate predicted values of the franchise preferred by each legislator given their estimated ideal point, and the relationship between roll call locations and cutpoints that is implied by the estimates. Specifically, we regress the cutpoint of each key vote, in terms of percentage of men or women enfranchised, on its estimated midpoint. We use a generalized additive model (GAM) to estimate this relationship, as the relationship between the estimated midpoints and the assumed cutpoints appears nonlinear. Based on the relationship we estimate, we generate predicted values for each MP's preferred male franchise given their estimated ideal point location on the same scale.

Figure 3: MPs' Estimated Male Franchise Preferences without Imputation



To illustrate the impact of imputation on legislators' ideal point estimates, Figures 3 and 4 display the ideal male franchise preferred by members of the British House of votes where they were not present in order to avoid contrary imputations, but also because these are legislators for whom the sincere voting assumption is arguably inappropriate.

Figure 4: MPs' Estimated Male Franchise Preferences with Imputation



Commons between 1830 and 191[8] with and without imputation, respectively. 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. However, Figure 4 differs from Figure 3 in relying on an augmented matrix of roll call votes where we incorporate information on how a legislator would have voted on a roll call for which they were not actually present – using policy content to anchor a subset of key votes relative to other key votes on franchise reform, and using the reasoning outlined previously in this section to infer the direction in which each legislator would likely have voted. In addition, Figure 4 indicates 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).¹¹ It also depicts the franchise determined by the law in place:

¹¹The data for the period before 1832 relies on the roll calls on electoral issues that took place in 1830 and 1831 (and before the elections that led to the reform approved in 1832).

notice that the calculation of the franchise is made at the beginning of each period; due to population and income growth, its actual extent changed over time, generally experiencing a slight upward drift.

A comparison of these two figures lends considerable face validity to our approach. Figure 3 reveals improbably little change in variance of MP preferences over the course of three franchise extensions and almost a century, and there is no visible trend in the preferences of the parliamentary median. This is in line with criticisms raised by Bateman et al. (2017), who note that when using standard approaches, the scope of political conflict in the United States appears unchanged between the mid-19th and late 20th centuries despite “the profoundly changing political, economic, and social circumstances in the United States over time” (p. 4).

By contrast, Figure 4 reveals three 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 10.5% of the adult male population eligible to vote and ended with the extension of universal suffrage. Second, variance remained quite high throughout the whole century: the distance between the MPs in 25th and 75th percentile in ideal franchise was, with the exception of the 1840s, 60 percentage points or higher until the early 20th century. Last but not least, the alignment between the ideal point of the median parliamentarian 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 had a more expansive position toward the franchise under the liberal majorities in the 1830s, late 1850s and 1860s. By contrast, it became less progressive once conservatives secured strong majorities in the last decades of second half of the 19th century.

3 Parties and Franchise Preferences

We start exploring the distribution of franchise preferences and its determinants by plotting in Figure 5 the ideal franchise of median parliamentarian for the main partisan groups in the House of Commons. Conservatives, in line with our theoretical expectations, maintained very restrictive views on the franchise systematically. Liberals defended more progressive positions already in the 1830s, with their median position trending upwards after the second electoral reform. That leftward drift accelerated after Liberal Unionists split following an intraparty dispute over the issue of Home Rule for Ireland. Liberal Unionists aligned themselves with extremely conservative positions: a result of either ideological similarities or strict party discipline]. Figure 5 also shows that, predictably, Lib-Lab MPs were the most favorable to support universal suffrage. Irish Nationalists were, with the exception of two parliamentary terms, to the left of Liberals. As a result of both the Liberals' growing progressivism and the emergence of radical parliamentarians to their left, overall polarization increased over time. For the two main parties, Liberals and Conservatives, the difference between party medians widened from about 40 percentage points until the late 1840s to more than 70 percentage points in 1890s. Change only occurred under World War One something we explore in more detail later on.

Figure 6 explores the evolution of the preferences of party medians toward the female franchise. Once again, Conservatives were extremely reluctant to grant the right to vote to women. By contrast, Liberals and Labour supported an increasingly progressive franchise. The Irish Nationalist median tracked the Liberal median until the turn of the century. Afterward, he straddled in between Conservatives and Liberals, arguably for strategic reasons: to defeat Liberal initiatives on suffrage that fell short of male universal suffrage and to press London to make concessions on Home Rule.

Figure 7 zooms in on the preferences of the two main parties Conservatives and Liberals. It plots the median (plus 25th and 75th percentiles and outliers) of liberal and

Figure 5: Party Median Preferences on Male Suffrage

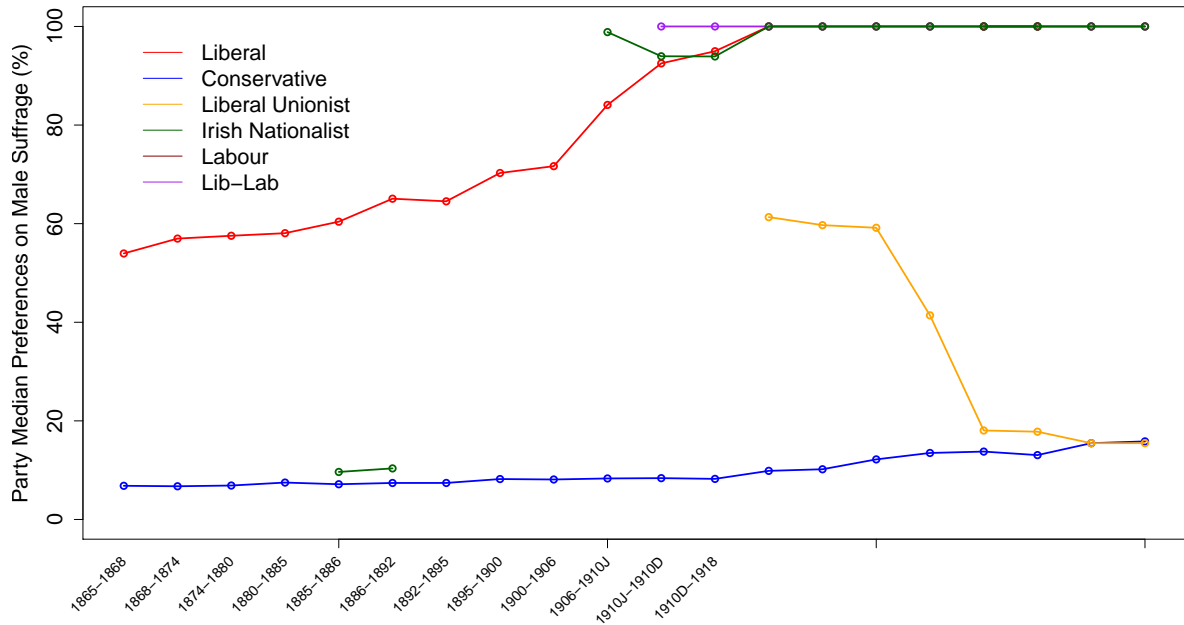
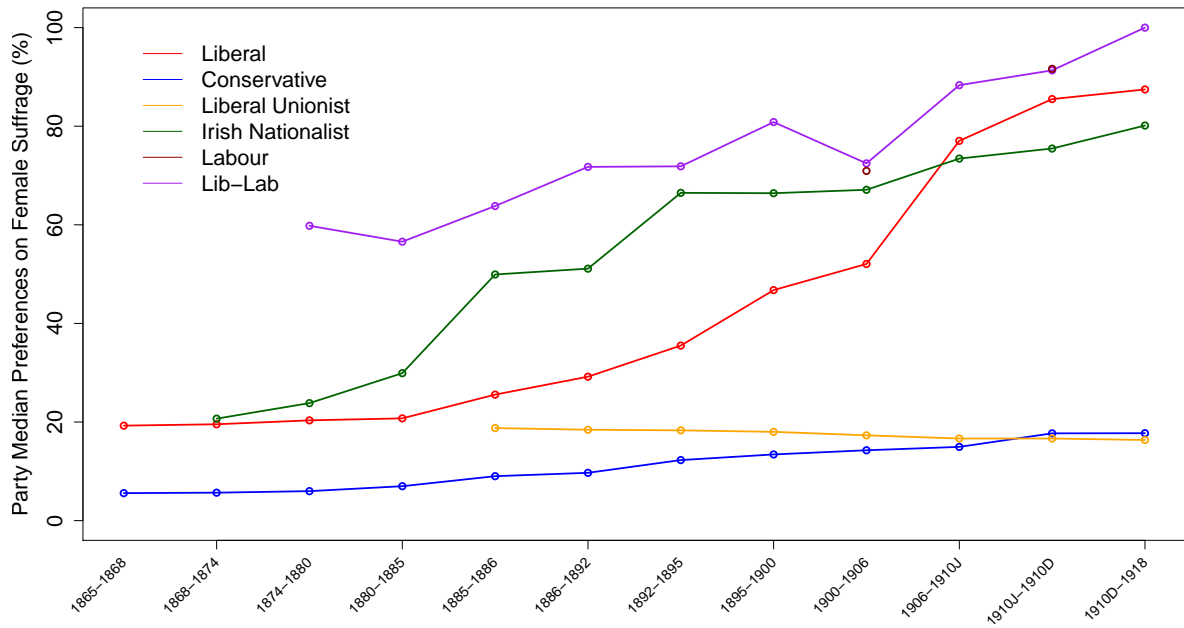


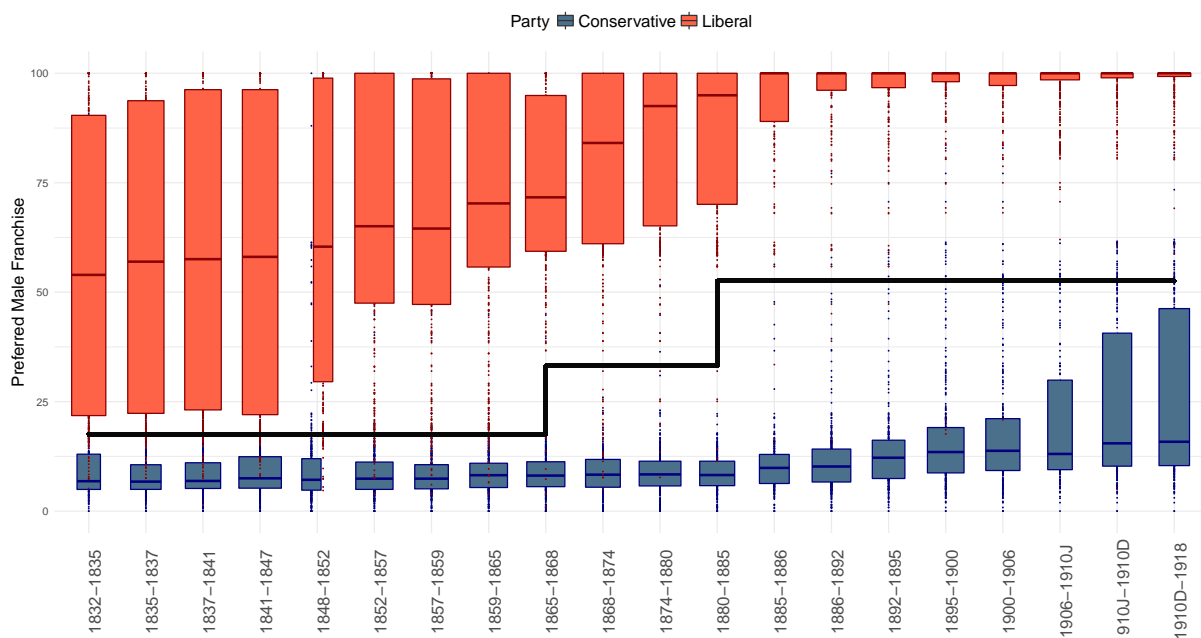
Figure 6: Party Median Preferences on Female Suffrage



conservative MPs separately. The width of bars are drawn proportional to the number of seats controlled by each party right after the election. The Liberal median favored a franchise almost three times wider than the one passed by parliament in 1832 during the following two decades. Having shifted to over 60 percent in the early 1850s and, gradually moving to the left afterwards, he reached 80 percent by the time of the third reform of 1884. By 1906, at the time of the radical turn engineered by Asquith and Lloyd George, the Liberal median was close to 100 percent – the level achieved with the fourth electoral reform of 1918. The Liberal party did not just become more progressive. It also gained in cohesiveness. Right until 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 it ranged from around 80 to 95 percent. In contrast to liberals, Tories hardly changed during most part of the 19th century. The conservative median only reached an ideal point of 15.5 percent after the liberal onslaught of 1906, and became rapidly more progressive in the succeeding two parliaments. During this same period, the conservative party also 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 1884.

Figure 8 graphs, in turn, the evolution of MP preferences regarding the female franchise between 1867, when the House of Commons voted on a proposal introduced by John S. Mill to grant women the suffrage in equal terms with men, and 1928, when the British Parliament approved the female universal suffrage. Conservatives remained strongly opposed until World War One: the median Tory MP favored a female suffrage below 25 percent as late as the 1910s. By contrast, a majority of Liberals supported the equalization of female and male suffrage conditions by the Parliament of 1906. Support for a female franchise declined in relative terms (that is, with respect to the male franchise) during the discussion of the Representation of the People Act approved in 1918: women

Figure 7: Major Party Preferences on Male Suffrage

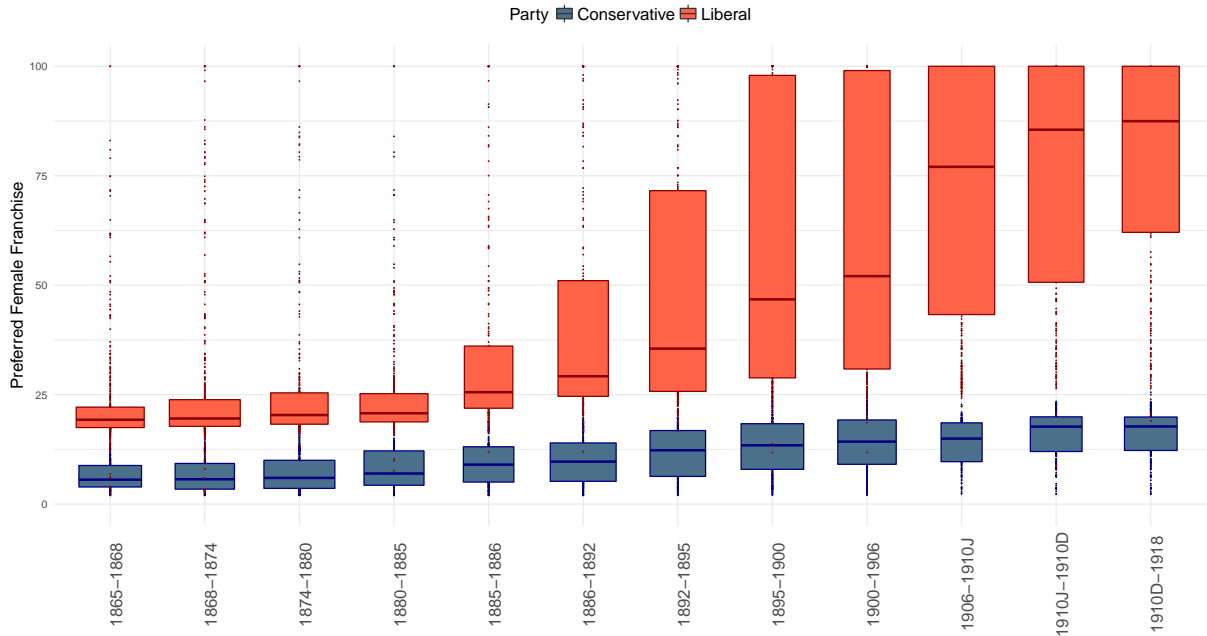


younger than 30 were denied the right to vote. As explained publicly by Willoughby Dickinson, a Liberal MP, one of the leading supporters of the female franchise and a member of the interparty Conference that had drafted the bill, that age limit had been agreed upon as a compromise to avoid giving women a majority over men, who had been decimated in the European war, at the ballot box (Morris 1921:145-6).

Laws changed in response to changes in the positions taken by MPs in the House of Commons, as expressed over a multitude of roll call votes on electoral matters, but it did conditional on the position of agenda setters.

Figure 9 depicts the status quo as well as the ideal points of both the liberal and conservative medians and of the liberal and conservative party leaders. Notice that the conservative leadership coincides with the very restrictive views of the conservative median. By contrast, the Whig/liberal party leaders (Russell, Palmerston, Gladstone, Cavendish, again Gladstone after 1874) were located below the liberal median – with

Figure 8: Major Party Preferences on Female Suffrage

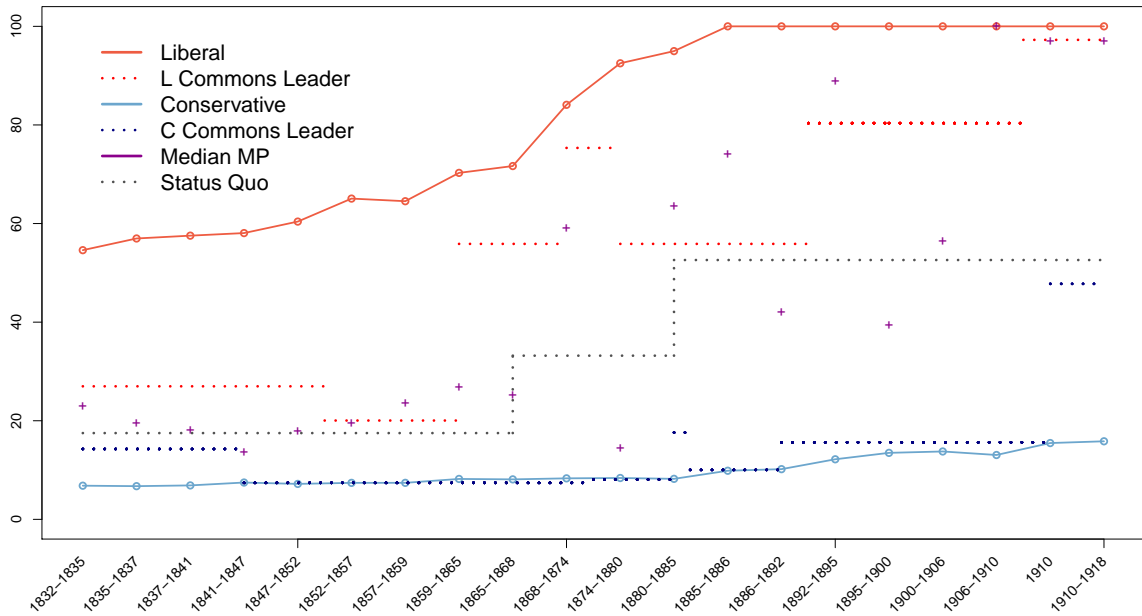


positions similar to liberals in the bottom quartile of the liberal distribution. Right after the first electoral reform, Russell, who led the party in the House of Commons from 1834 until 1855, preferred only a slightly more progressive position than the status quo. A similar logic prevailed during the first years under Palmerston’s leadership – at the end of the 1852-57 parliament – when the median parliamentarian was essentially in favor of the existing franchise.

The legal status quo in suffrage was correlated with the position of the median parliamentarian throughout the first half of the 19th century: the 1826 and 1830 parliaments resisted any reform; the elections of 1831 triggered a Whig victory and the first electoral reform; then, with the exception of the 1832 parliament – which delivered a strongly progressive majority – up until the 1857 parliament, the median parliamentarian coincided with the status quo.

After 1857 and until the conservative victory of 1874, the median parliamentarian

Figure 9: Party Median vs. Leader Preferences on Male Suffrage



shifted to the left of the status quo. The Liberal victory of 1857 created a decisive majority in favor of a broader franchise. The median parliamentarian now preferred a franchise including about 30 percent of all men and the liberal party median favored a franchise two times larger. Radical and backbencher pressure for reform was therefore intense. And, yet, it took three legislatures and a conservative leadership to pass the second reform of 1867.

Agenda-setting Powers. The stability of the existing status quo arguably derived from the distribution of preferences within parties (and, in particular, within the Liberal party) and the role played by governing party leaders in setting the parliamentary agenda. Palmerston, the Liberal party leader, who had an estimated ideal male franchise of about 20 percent, was closer to the Whig faction than the median of his party. Naturally unwilling to open Pandora’s box and the door to mass democracy, his 1859 proposal only proposed marginal changes to the post-1832 status quo, only expanding

the franchise by 2 to 3 percentage points according to our estimations. Russell and the majority of the Liberal party defeated the proposition, leading to new elections. In the following parliament, the median parliamentarian veered slightly to the right but the Liberal party, on the whole, became even more progressive on the franchise issue. However, new proposals, which would have expanded the franchise by 5 to 6 percentage points of the electorate, failed to pass – arguably because Russell could not prevent defections by the more moderate Liberal parliamentarians.

Under the stewardship of Derby and Disraeli, the Conservative minority government that followed was able to do what moderate Whig leaders had not done. Bolstered by the support of their own party (with reactionary but very cohesive preferences) and of moderate Liberals, they could pass a reform (backed by most Liberals, either through tactical votes or abstention) that shifted the status quo franchise to include about 30 percent of all men. Disraeli’s reform arguably derived from the strategic calculations of the Tory leader. Even though the male franchise we estimate Disraeli to have preferred was much lower than the one that resulted from the reform approved in 1867, the Conservative prime minister must have calculated that allowing Liberals to take the lead would have resulted in a worse electoral reform for Tory interests over time. 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. By passing a slightly amplified version of Russell’s reform, Disraeli could prevent an even wider reform and, more crucially, attenuate the potential negative impact of a wider electorate on growth of the electorate 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 and that tended to favor the entry of Tory representation in urban settings (Seymour, 1915; Smith, 1966).

4 Why Did Some MPs Like Democracy?

Which factors might explain the wide variation in the attitudes of British MPs to democracy, as well as their transformation over the course of a century?

As briefly sketched in Section 1, the position of parliamentarians with respect to franchise expansion depended on two main (arguably interrelated) factors: first, the effects of the franchise on policy making (and therefore on the benefits and costs it could have on the enfranchised electorate and on the economy at large); second, the impact that a wider electorate could have on the chances MPs may have to retain their seat. The first factor was, in turn, a function of (at least) one of the following three conditions: the overall social structure (in terms of its stratification, that is, the inequalities within franchised individuals and between the latter and those without the right to vote); the type of wealth; and the overall level of development (level of income). The second factor, that is, the MP's reelection chances, hinged on those three conditions too. In addition, incumbents representing constituencies with a large mass of still unenfranchised voters were likely to be more reluctant than MPs from constituencies with fewer excluded individuals to expand the franchise: the former calculated that they could not easily prevail over unenfranchised individuals against a third-party competitor.

As a first step to evaluate the role of social and economic factors, Figures 10 and 11 show the distribution of ideal points of liberal and conservative MPs broken down by type of constituency – boroughs and counties. Liberal MPs representing counties and those representing boroughs diverged quite sharply in their preferences, especially in the

Figure 10: Liberal MP Preferences on Male Suffrage by Constituency Type

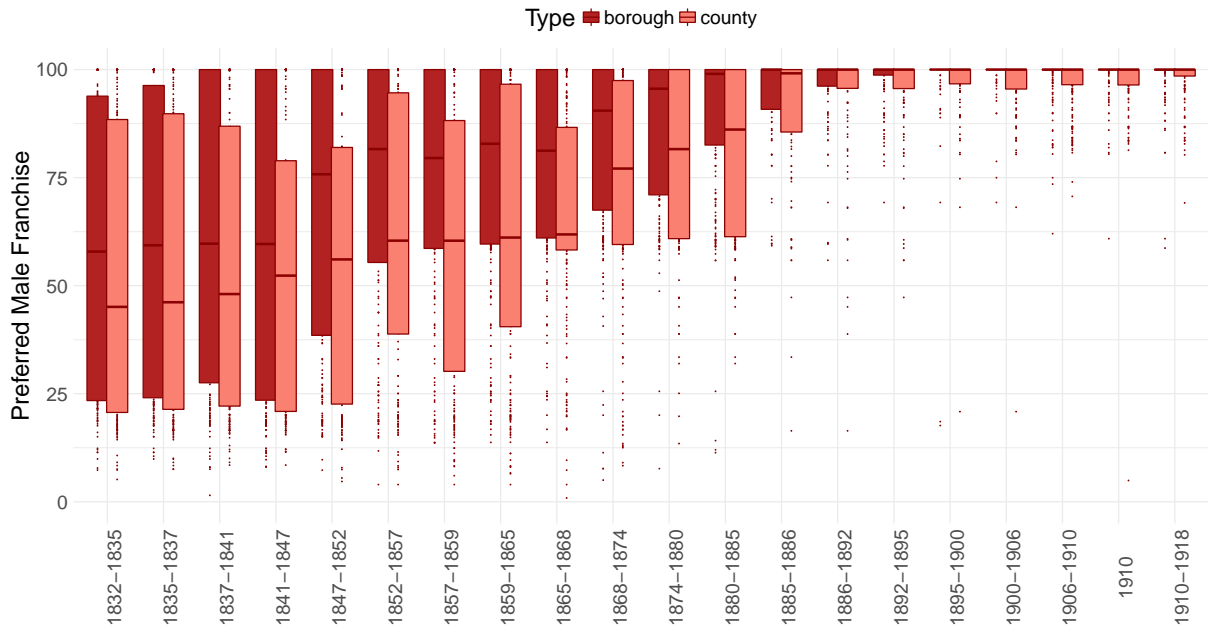
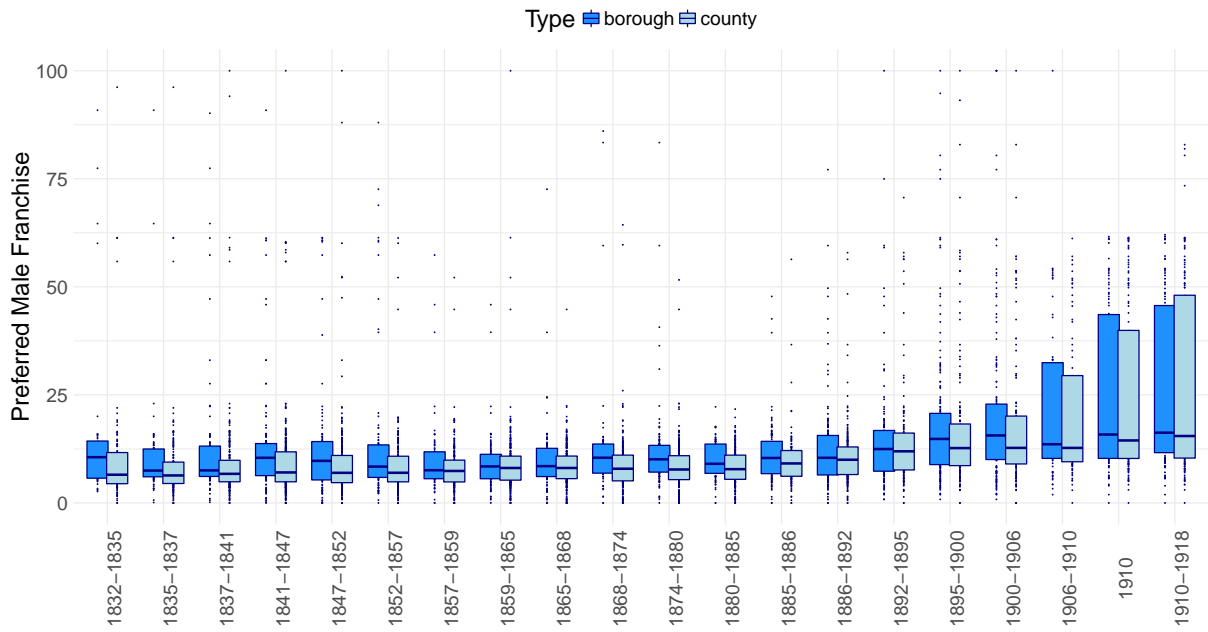


Figure 11: Conservative MP Preferences on Male Suffrage by Constituency Type



early and mid-nineteenth centuries (Figure 10). In all legislatures, the median Liberal county MP favored a smaller franchise than the median, typically very progressive, Liberal borough MP – although liberal MPs of both types varied considerably in their franchise preferences. The divergence between those two types of Liberal MPs collapsed over the course of the century, essentially vanishing after the third reform of 1884–85. So did the variance among liberal MPs: by the 1880s, both county and borough Liberal MPs appear, on average, to agree on the need for an expansive male franchise. By contrast, conservative MPs representing counties had extremely reactionary attitudes with respect to the franchise. In rural areas, where landowners controlled elections – often through a patronage system (Stokes et al. 2016, Velasco Rivera 2017) – their representatives blocked any significant electoral reform. Still, there is little evidence that franchise preferences varied substantially by type of constituency in any era. The median conservative MP representing a borough typically had similar franchise preferences to the median conservative county MP – although the preferences of borough conservatives exhibit slightly higher dispersion (Figure 11).

We now turn to examine the covariates of franchise preferences among legislators more formally by estimating the following baseline model using OLS:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{i,t} + \beta_2 L_{i,t} + \beta_3 C_{i,t} + \beta_4 R_{i,t} + \beta_5 X_{i,t} L_{i,t} + \beta_6 X_{i,t} C_{i,t} + \beta_7 X_{i,t} R_{i,t} + \eta_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

where $Y_{i,t}$ is the mean preferred franchise of MPs elected to represent constituency i at time t , $X_{i,t}$ is a social or economic covariate of interest for constituency i at time t (e.g. proportion of a given social strata such as skilled industrial workers), $L_{i,t}$ (or $C_{i,t}$, $R_{i,t}$) is the proportion of MPs representing constituency i at time t who are Liberal (or Conservative, or Radical)¹², η_i is a constituency-specific effect and δ_t is a period-specific

¹²We classify MPs running as Liberal or independent Liberals as “liberal”, Lib/Labs, Labour, Irish Nationalists and Chartists as “radical”, and Conservative and Unionist MPs as “conservative”).

effect. The unit-constituency-specific effect η_i captures the unobserved characteristics of the parliamentary constituency. The period-specific effects δ_t capture common shocks affecting all legislators across the country at time t .

The data of social strata or classes is constructed 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 for that census-year. The aggregation is done by identifying the HISCO code corresponding to each worker’s occupation (as recorded in the census), and classifying individuals into the following categories based on their HISCO codes: non-manual occupations (HISCLASS categories 1 through 5, that is, higher managers, higher professionals, lower managers, lower professionals, and lower clerical and sales personnel), medium-skilled manual non-farm occupations (HISCLASS categories 6 and 7, i.e. foremen, medium-skilled workers), low-skilled non-farm workers (HISCLASS category 9), skilled agricultural occupations (HISCLASS categories 8 and 10, i.e. farmers, fishermen and lower-skilled farm workers), unskilled non-farm occupations (HISCLASS 11) and unskilled agricultural occupations (HISCLASS 12).¹³ In addition, we control for the proportion of MPs who were eligible for a peerage¹⁴ or who held office at the time of the election, number of non-Anglican ministers per 1,000 persons, for logged population density, by-elections, and number of seats in the constituency.

Table 1 reports regression results from several specifications. Model (1) reports results

¹³Individual-level census data was obtained from the Integrated Census Microdata (ICeM) project, and parish and constituency boundaries from the Great Britain Historical Database. In order to match the census and electoral data, we first aggregated the individual-level census data to the parish level, and matched each parish to one or more constituencies. To accommodate the many instances where a parish was subdivided between multiple constituencies, we applied 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 used log-linear interpolation to generate constituency-election specific values for each variable (log-linear extrapolation for the period 1832-51), assuming a constant exponential rate of growth for each variable between census years.

¹⁴Information on the peerages held by MPs was obtained from the Parliamentary Archive of MPs compiled by Michael Rush. As now, MPs could not simultaneously sit in the House of Commons and the House of Lords; thus, 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.

for the baseline specification, while Model (2) omits time fixed effects. Model (3) reports results when the baseline model is estimated with random rather than fixed effects.

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

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Non-Manual	298.24 (214.09)	452.43** (226.44)	409.93* (226.35)
Proportion Liberal	185.08 (124.25)	264.31** (131.35)	237.244* (132.02)
Non-Manual * Prop. Liberal	-237.80 (214.00)	-279.76 (226.42)	-286.14 (226.37)
Proportion Conservative	149.52 (124.21)	241.63* (131.31)	215.80* (131.99)
Non-Manual * Prop. Conservative	-328.90 (213.98)	-370.27** (226.41)	-382.03* (226.34)
Proportion Radical Left	181.62 (133.43)	263.47* (141.04)	264.07* (140.72)
Non-Manual * Prop. Rad. Left	-258.18 (218.89)	-305.86 (231.51)	-345.46 (231.78)
Skilled Agricultural	557.43 (371.39)	801.24** (392.41)	738.75* (391.77)
Skilled Agricultural * Prop. Liberal	-466.70 (370.95)	-544.47 (392.41)	-569.10 (391.77)
Skilled Agricultural * Prop. Conservative	-512.42 (371.04)	-646.30* (392.52)	-679.83* (391.82)
Skilled Agricultural * Prop. Rad. Left	-270.83 (419.99)	-489.89 (444.28)	-577.31 (438.78)
Unskilled Industrial	363.85*** (161.99)	442.07*** (171.28)	394.60** (169.87)
Unskilled Industrial * Prop. Liberal	-348.41*** (161.91)	-413.69** (171.20)	-397.32** (169.90)
Unskilled Industrial * Prop. Conservative	-349.83***	-422.30**	-401.79**

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

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	(162.01)	(171.30)	(170.00)
Unskilled Industrial * Prop. Rad. Left	-207.43 (172.72)	-329.55* (182.60)	-355.40* (181.81)
Low Skilled Industrial	246.93*** (121.89)	396.36*** (128.75)	337.875*** (129.40)
Low Skilled Industrial * Prop. Liberal	-202.05* (121.69)	-279.02** (128.64)	-250.02* (9.542)
Low Skilled Industrial * Prop. Conservative	-239.66** (121.63)	-323.16*** (128.57)	-298.01** (129.34)
Low Skilled Industrial * Prop. Rad. Left	-197.82 (130.22)	-276.46** (49.273)	-281.45** (137.39)
Medium Skilled Industrial	99.11 (170.47)	139.432*** (180.22)	166.66 (180.26)
Medium Skilled Industrial * Prop. Liberal	-198.99 (170.33)	-42.316*** (180.09)	-140.59 (180.27)
Medium Skilled Industrial * Prop. Conservative	-65.21 (170.36)	-209.33 (180.10)	-154.17 (180.30)
Medium Skilled Industrial * Prop. Rad. Left	-108.87 (178.34)	-204.54 (188.56)	-148.32 (187.86)
Other	-306.39 (582.46)	127.83 (616.38)	-37.90 (615.69)
Other * Prop. Liberal	368.46 (582.89)	-40.35 (616.53)	76.11 (615.69)
Other * Prop. Conservative	360.95 (582.47)	-57.16 (616.42)	74.38 (615.61)
Other * Prop. Rad. Left	366.59 (653.55)	253.21 (691.53)	264.02 (687.00)
Prop. Peers	-2.75*** (0.61)	-2.36*** (0.65)	-2.45*** (0.63)

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

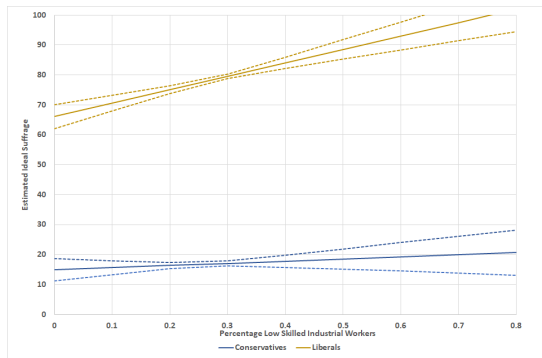
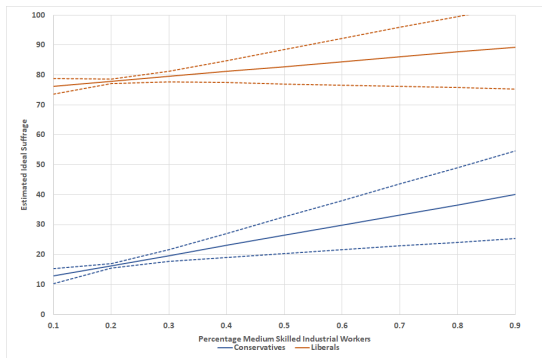
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Prop. Officeholders	-6.14*** (0.81)	-5.94*** (0.86)	-5.80*** (0.85)
Non Anglican Pastors per 1000 Persons	0.65*** (0.12)	-0.24* (0.13)	-0.11 (0.126)
Log(Population Density)	1.36*** (0.52)	1.35*** (0.55)	0.84*** (0.32)
By Election	3.19*** (0.64)	-2.39*** (0.63)	-4.01*** (0.60)
Number Seats	2.36*** (0.69)	-4.94*** (0.68)	-7.67*** (0.59)
Observations	8,348	8,348	8,348
R ²	0.770	0.694	0.722

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

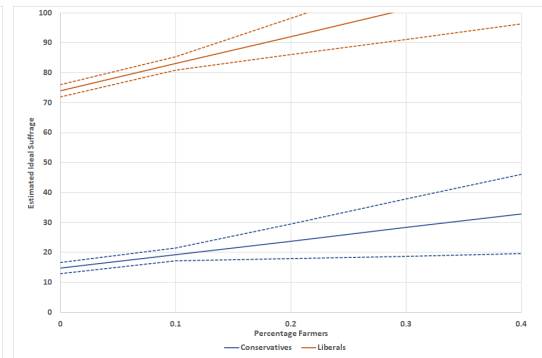
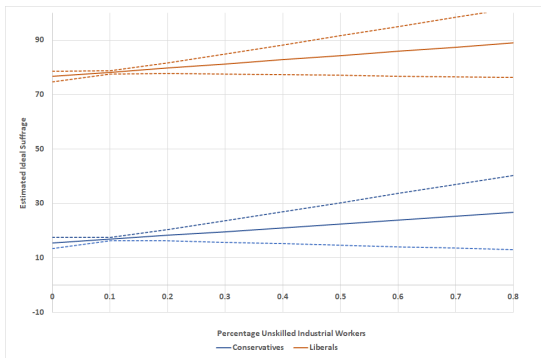
Note: Cell entries present coefficient estimates from OLS models of MPs' preferences over the size of the male franchise. Standard errors are given in parentheses.

To ease the interpretation of our results, we plot the results (in Model 1) for medium skilled, low skilled, unskilled workers and for skilled farmers in Figures 12a through 12d. A growing proportion of medium skilled workers makes parties more amenable to an expansive franchise but the effect is particularly strong for Conservative MPs. In turn, higher numbers of low skilled workers, that is, standard manufacturing workers, are associated with a more progressive position among Liberal MPs. Among Conservatives, there is a small positive effect but it is not statistically significant. Unskilled workers led to slightly more progressive Liberal MPs. For Conservative MPs, there is no statistically significant relationship. (Because the plot is based on regressions where the reference category is unskilled agricultural workers, any increase in skilled industrial workers comes at the expense of unskilled agricultural workers.) In Figure 12d, a growing strata of skilled farmers led to a more favorable view of a broad suffrage across the board. Because

Figure 12: Party Effect Conditional on Constituency Composition

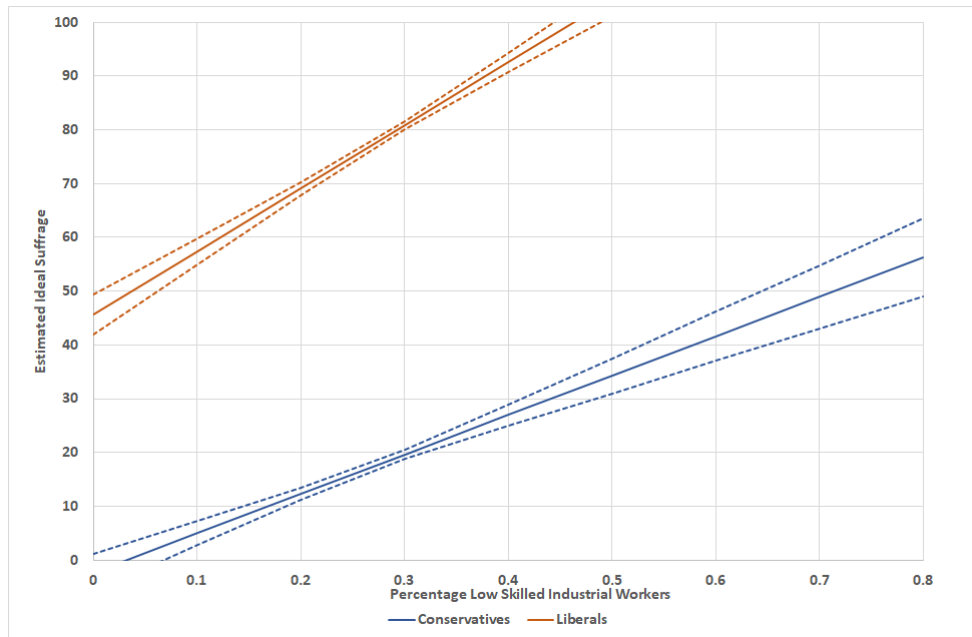


(a) Party Effect Conditional on Proportion in Medium-Skilled Industrial Occupations (b) Party Effect Conditional on Proportion in Low-Skilled Industrial Occupations



(c) Party Effect Conditional on Proportion in Unskilled Industrial Occupations (d) Party Effect Conditional on Proportion in Skilled Agricultural Occupations

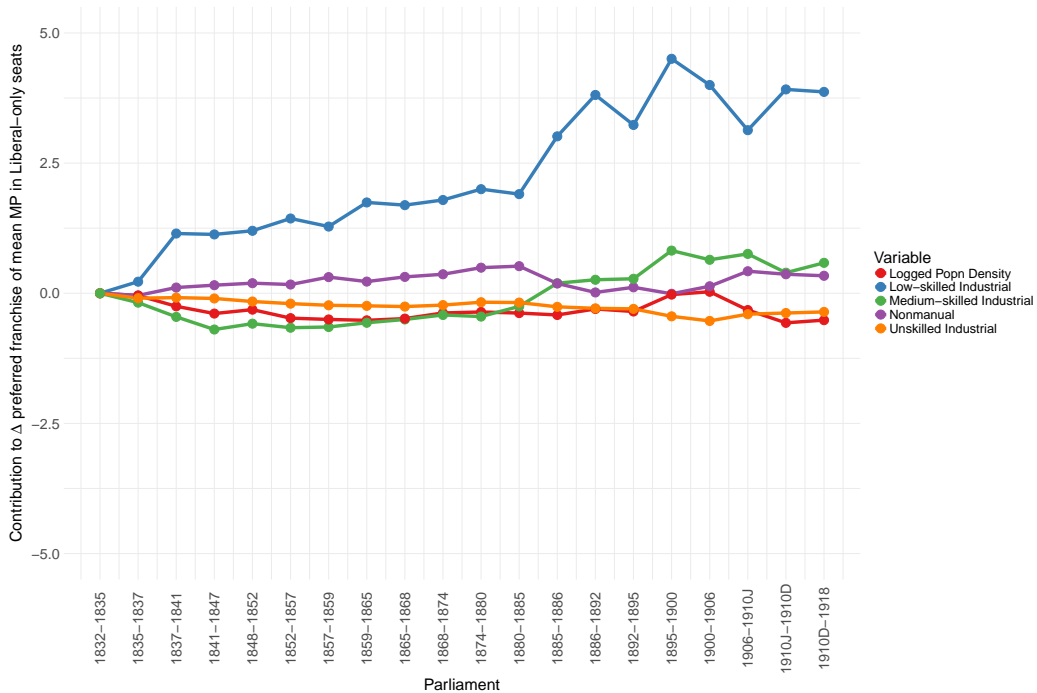
Figure 13: Conditional Party Effect Estimated without Time Fixed Effects



propertied farmers provided a stronghold against redistributive demands, politicians were open toward a more inclusive franchise in those communities.

All in all, the single most important determinant of MPs' franchise preferences was the displacement of unskilled agricultural workers by semi-skilled industrial workers or, in other words, the process of turning peasants into industrial employees. Crucially, the effect was conditional on both the MP's partisan affiliation and the type of worker. Albeit reluctantly, Conservative MPs supported a wider franchise in constituencies with a strong "middle" class (as defined by having a sizable number of medium skilled workers). Liberal MPs did too in those constituencies. Low-skilled industrial workers, who were the result of the process of industrialization, had a sharply differential effect on Conservatives and Liberals. Liberal MPs representing constituencies with large numbers of low-skilled workers favored a wider franchise. Conservative politicians did not. In short, Liberal and Conservative politicians' positions' as a function of the distribution of voters in their respective constituencies seem to validate the distributional concerns we discussed in our

Figure 14: Explanatory Power of Individual Structural Factors



theoretical section.

The positive impact of skilled industrial workers on the Liberal party’s position toward the franchise was likely to be the result of a process of economic change and industrialization. Figure 13, where we plot the impact of low skilled industrial workers using our estimations without time fixed effects from Model 2 in Table 1, seems to confirm the effect of modernization. Liberals respond more starkly to an increase (that now integrates the change that happened over time) in skilled occupations in the manufacturing sector.

This interpretation is reinforced by Figure 14, where we quantify the ability of each economic covariate at a time to explain the observed trend in franchise preferences for the mean MP in Liberal-only seats while holding all other economic variables (proportion employed by sector and logged population density) at their mean values for such seats (e.g. for seats with only Liberal MPs). We find that the mean observed changes in these economic variables alone account for an almost six-percentage-point increase in

the mean franchise preferred by MPs. Figure 14 shows that almost the entirety of this increase can be attributed to changes in the proportion of individuals employed in low-skilled industries rather than unskilled agriculture in these seats – rather than any other structural factor.

5 The Effect of World War One on MP Preferences

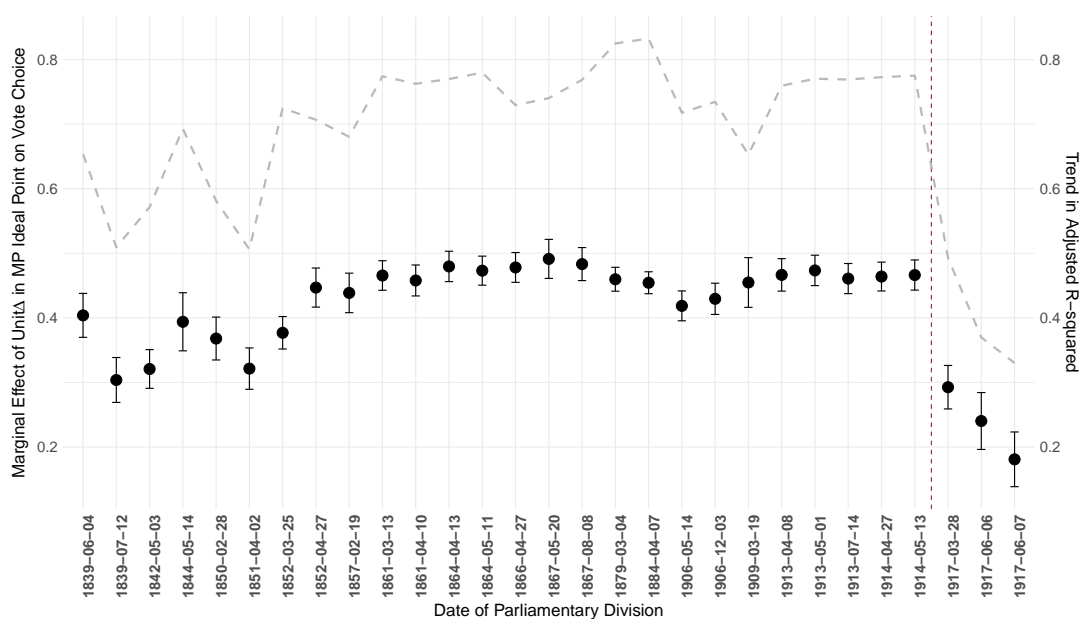


Figure 15: Trend in Explanatory Power of MP Ideal Points

Based on the patterns depicted in Figures 5 and 7, it would appear that, even before Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, the range of opinion on male suffrage within the Conservative party was widening. In place of almost unified opposition to any extension of the suffrage beyond the 1832 status quo, it would seem that, from 1906 onward, a sizeable and growing chunk of Conservative MPs with more progressive views on the franchise—by the standards of their party—were being elected. However, as the estimation procedure we employ only produces a single ideal point estimate for each MP based on their average voting record on this issue, and these are among the first cohorts of

MPs who also served during World War One, it is also possible that these MPs' pre-war voting records were no more progressive than earlier intakes of Conservative MPs – but that they grew more supportive of a wider male franchise during the war years, and this is what we see reflected in their ideal points. The results reported in Figure 15 indicate that the latter explanation is more likely to be true, and provide suggestive evidence in favor of a “war effect” on MP's franchise preferences.

Figure 15 plots two trends: first, the marginal effect of MP's estimated ideal points on their vote in favor of franchise extension for all key votes from 1832 onwards (in black, with 95% confidence intervals), and second, the adjusted R-squared from each of these (univariate) regressions. The dashed vertical red line separates key votes that occurred before and after the outbreak of World War One, with the last pre-war key vote occurring in June 1914, less than two months before the start of the war. Both trends tell a similar story: we find 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 0.5 in March 1917, and 0.3 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 – suggesting that wartime developments may have 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.

6 Conclusions

Why did British elites vote, through four successive reforms, to extend the franchise to the masses between 1832 and 1918? We shed new light on this question by estimating the franchise preferences of British parliamentarians in this period, and exploring how they

might relate to the process of economic and social modernization in 19th and early 20th century Britain. To ensure that the preferences we estimate are substantively meaningful and comparable over time, following Bateman et al. (2017), we restrict attention to votes directly relating to the franchise, and use actual information about the real or potential franchise effects of reform proposals to, first, anchor key votes, and second, impute the behavior of legislators on key votes for which they were not actually present.

We find that, as expected, the parliamentary median embraced a progressively more generous franchise over time, but that there was a substantial partisan divide on the franchise issue that persisted till, at least, the beginning of the First World War. In particular, while the median liberal parliamentarian consistently favored a much larger franchise than the legal status quo, conservative parliamentarians were almost united throughout in opposing almost any suffrage extension. Moreover, this gulf widened rather than dissipated with time, as variance in opinion within the liberal party collapsed while the liberal party median continued to drift leftwards and the conservatives largely stayed put. In light of these findings, we suggest that the relative conservatism of liberal party leaders on this issue and their disproportionate influence over the parliamentary agenda may explain why, despite the progressivism of liberal parliamentarians throughout and a sympathetic parliamentary median after 1857, the second electoral reform was only passed in 1867 and under a conservative government.

We speculate that the process of social and economic modernization in Britain may explain the leftward drift in MP preferences on the franchise issue, as well as some of the within-party variation we observe. Consistent with these hypotheses, we find that, at least within the liberal party and at least until 1884–1885, MPs who represented borough seats typically favored a larger franchise than MPs representing county seats. Additionally, we find a strong and negative association between MPs' franchise preferences and social structure. Parliamentarians elected in unequal constituencies and in districts with landed

wealth were more likely to oppose the expansion of the franchise to sectors that would jeopardize the status of the already enfranchised electors. Development, however, seemed to have a softening effect on the opposition to universal suffrage.

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Appendices

A Key Votes on Franchise Reform

A.1 MP Preferences over the Male Franchise

Table 2: Key Votes on Male Suffrage

Date of Vote	Estimated Roll Call Location	Proposed Male Franchise	Status Quo	Cutpoint
1. 28 May 1830	-0.186	99	10.5	54.75
2. 22 March 1831	0.635	15.5	10.5	13
3. 6 July 1831	0.656	15.5	10.5	13
4. 19 September 1831	0.582	17.5	10.5	14
5. 22 March 1832	0.575	17.5	10.5	14
6. 4 June 1839	0.117	22.3	17.5	19.9
7. 12 July 1839	-0.312	99	17.5	58.25
8. 3 May 1842	-0.316	99	17.5	58.25
9. 14 May 1844	-0.292	99	17.5	58.25
10. 28 February 1850	-0.286	99	17.5	58.25
11. 2 April 1851	0.040	22.3	17.5	19.9
12. 25 March 1852	-0.267	99	17.5	58.25
13. 27 April 1852	0.156	22.3	17.5	19.9
14. 19 February 1857	0.128	22.3	17.5	19.9
15. 13 March 1861	0.294	20	17.5	18.75
16. 10 April 1861	0.134	22.6	17.5	20.05
17. 13 April 1864	0.265	20.0	17.5	18.75
18. 11 May 1864	0.149	22.6	17.5	20.05
19. 27 April 1866	0.066	23.9	17.5	20.7
20. 20 May 1867	0.167	28.4	27.5	27.95
21. 8 August 1867	0.136	33.2	32.25	32.725
22. 4 March 1879	0.053	52.6	33.2	42.9
23. 7 April 1884	0.049	52.6	33.2	42.9
24. 14 May 1906	-0.205	59.6	52.6	56.1
25. 3 December 1906	-0.217	59.6	52.6	56.1
26. 19 March 1909	-0.570	99	52.6	75.8
27. 8 April 1913	-0.267	59.6	52.6	56.1
28. 1 May 1913	-0.274	59.6	52.6	56.1
29. 14 July 1913	-0.275	59.6	52.6	56.1
30. 27 April 1914	-0.269	59.6	52.6	56.1
31. 13 May 1914	-0.267	59.6	52.6	56.1
32. 6 June 1917	-0.450	96	99	97.5
33. 7 June 1917	-0.201	98	52.6	75.3
34. 28 March 1917	-0.202	98	52.6	75.3

Table 3: 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.	15.5
3. 6 July 1831	Second reading of second iteration of the Reform Bill.	15.5
4. 19 September 1831	Third reading of the Reform Bill.	17.5
5. 22 March 1832	Third reading of the Reform Bill, after incorporating Lords' amendments.	17.5
6. 4 June 1839	Motion proposing to expand the county franchise.	22.3
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.	22.3
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.	22.3
14. 19 February 1857	Motion requesting leave to introduce bill to expand the county franchise.	22.3
15. 31 March 1861	Second reading of County Franchise Bill.	20
16. 10 April 1861	Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill.	22.6
17. 13 April 1864	Second reading of County Franchise Bill.	20
18. 11 May 1864	Second reading of Borough Franchise Bill.	22.6
19. 27 April 1866	Second reading of the Representation of the People Bill.	23.9
20. 20 May 1867	Liberal amendment to reduce copyhold franchise to £5. Committee vote.	28.4
21. 8 August 1867	Commons vote on Lords' amendment to retain £10 copyhold franchise.	33.2
22. 4 March 1879	Motion to extend borough franchise to counties.	52.6
23. 7 April 1884	Vote supporting continued debate on the Representation of the People Bill.	52.6
24. 14 May 1906	Second reading of Plural Voting Bill.	52.6
25. 3 December 1906	Second reading of Plural Voting Bill.	52.6
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.	52.6
28. 1 May 1913	Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill.	52.6
29. 14 July 1913	Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill.	52.6
30. 27 April 1914	Second reading of Plural Voting Bill	52.6
31. 13 May 1914	Second reading of the Plural Voting Bill	52.6
32. 6 June 1917	Proposal to reintroduce the ownership vote.	96
33. 7 June 1917	Vote on Clause 1. of the Representation of the People Bill.	98
34. 28 March 1917	Asquith motion demanding universal male suffrage with residence qualifications.	98

A.2 MP Preferences over the Female Franchise

Table 4: Key Votes on Female Suffrage

Date of Vote	Estimated Roll Call Location	Proposed Female Franchise	Status Quo	Cutpoint
1. 20 May 1867	-0.547	28.4	0	14.2
2. 12 May 1870	-0.209	33.2	0	16.6
3. 3 May 1871	-0.235	33.2	0	16.6
4. 26 April 1876	-0.213	33.2	0	16.6
5. 19 June 1878	-0.205	33.2	0	16.6
6. 12 June 1884	0.254	52.6	0	26.3
7. 27 April 1892	0.270	52.6	0	26.3
8. 3 February 1897	0.267	52.6	0	26.3
9. 19 March 1909	0.660	61	0	30.5
10. 12 July 1910	0.319	52.6	0	26.3
11. 28 March 1912	-1.059	9.3	0	4.65
12. 6 May 1913	0.214	44.8	0	22.4
13. 28 March 1917	0.539	61	0	30.5
14. 6 June 1917	4.338	59	61	60
15. 19 June 1917	0.471	60	0	30
16. 29 March 1928	3.215	98	60	79

A.3 Sources and Methods Employed to Calculate Proportion of Enfranchised Individuals

To apply the procedure developed Bateman, Clinton and Lapinski (2017), we restrict attention to votes on bills and motions between 1826 and 1918 that dealt with male franchise reform (and 1867 to 1928 for the female vote). Relying on the dataset compiled by Eggers and Spirling (2014), we identify 325 such votes in this period. From these votes, we select 34 votes for the imputation procedure (and 16 for the female franchise).

Table 5: Information on Key Votes on Female Suffrage

Date of Vote	Notes	Implied Female Franchise (%)
1. 20 May 1867	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	28.4
2. 12 May 1870	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	33.2
3. 3 May 1871	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	33.2
4. 26 April 1876	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	33.2
5. 19 June 1876	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	33.2
6. 12 June 1884	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	52.6
7. 27 April 1892	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	52.6
8. 3 February 1897	Proposal to enfranchise women on same terms as men.	52.6
9. 19 March 1909	Proposal to enfranchise some women.	61
10. 12 July 1910	Proposal to enfranchise some women based on household and occupation qualifications.	52.6
11. 28 March 1912	Proposal to only enfranchise female householders residing in a different parliamentary division from their husbands.	9.3
12. 6 May 1913	Proposal to enfranchise women older than 25 who were either married to a householder or householders themselves.	44.8
13. 28 March 1917	Proposal to enfranchise all women older than 30.	61
14. 6 June 1917	Proposal to reintroduce the ownership vote.	59
15. 19 June 1917	Proposal to retain female enfranchisement clause in bill.	60
16. 29 March 1928	Second reading of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Bill.	98

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.

For each vote, we have identified the percentage of individuals (men or women depending on the content of the bill or proposal under consideration) that would have been enfranchised had that particular vote been successful.

To that effect, we have employed data from the population censuses conducted every ten years and starting in 1831 to calculate the number of individuals (males, females) older than 20. For those years where the census was not conducted, we determine the number of adult individuals by 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:

1/ For male franchise;

i/ 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).

ii/ For the votes of 1831 and 1832, we employ the estimates reported by Seymour (1915).

iii/ For the proposals and votes of April 1851 , April 1852 and February 1857, we use the estimates of (?).

iv/ For the proposals from 1861 through 1884 the estimates of Seymour (1915). To clarify the exact definition of the amendments to the 1867 reform, we also employ Saunders (2011).

v/ For the votes of 1906 and 1913 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 NNNN.

vi/ For the reforms of 1917-18, we rely on the estimates of Morris (1921) as well as the figures provided by British MPs in the parliamentary debates, reported in the Hansard (5th series, vol. 94)

2/ For female franchise:

i/ For those proposals that implied equalizing the female franchise to the male franchise, we use the estimates in place for the male suffrage (proposals of 1867 through 1897).

ii/ For the proposal of 1912 and 1913, we employ the estimates reported by (?), we combined historical census data, information from relevant parliamentary debates in Hansard and historical commentary on the implications of each vote (Seymour, 1915; Saunders, 2011).

iii/ For the proposal of March 1917, we calculate the proportion of women older

than 30. We adjust the proportion in the votes of June 1917, which considered the reintroduction of some form of ownership vote, following the same calculations applied to the male suffrage.

To give an example of how we reconstructed the potential and final franchise, we report the key provisions related to the electoral reform of 1867, including a brief description of the proposed bill or amendment (at the top of the column) and the date the provision was voted or passed by the House of Commons in Table 6. For each alternative, and organized by rows, we indicate the effects it had (or would have had) on the franchise as estimated by (Seymour, 1915). The rows give the information for counties and boroughs – by separate items (such as number of plural voters or number of voters enfranchised through the so called lodger franchise) and then as net change. The table goes on to give the overall net change, the number of enfranchised men before the reform, the total number of enfranchised after the amendment and, on the basis of the census data, the proportion of adult men that would have had the right to vote. Notice that, among the proposals we show, the first column (18 March) corresponds to the bill as proposed by Disraeli. The other two make reference to the two voted amendments we employ to determine the MP preferences over the male franchise.

Table 6: An Example: Estimating Franchise in 1867 Votes

Estimation of Franchise Under Different Bill Proposals in 1867			
	Disraeli Bill	Copyhold Franchise Lowered to 5	Commons Re- jects Changes Introduced by Lords
	18 March	20 May	8 August
COUNTIES			
Lower Thresholds	158,283	158,283	158,283
Copyhold Franchise to 5		56,000	56,000
Reduction from 15 to 12			35,000
BOROUGHES			
Qualification	245,000		
Idem + Compoundings Abolished		684,144	684,114
Lodger Franchise		5,000	5,000
Plural Voting	-250,000	-250,000	
NET CHANGES IN FRANCHISE			
Net Change in Counties' Franchise	158,283	214,283	249,283
Net Change in Borough' Franchise	-5,000	439,144	689,144
Net Change in Total Franchise	153,283	653,427	938,427
ESTIMATED FRANCHISE			
Franchise before Reform	1,056,659	1,056,659	1,056,659
Total Number Enfranchised Including Proposals	1,209,943	1,710,086	1,995,086
Total Men Older than 20	5,598,734	5,598,734	5,598,734
Percent Men Enfranchised After Proposals	21.61	30.54	35.63