The Political Economy of Suffrage Reform:
The Great Reform Act of 1832

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Abstract

Prominent scholars have viewed the Great Reform Act as a concession made by incumbent elites in order to defuse a revolutionary threat. In this paper, we argue that the threat from below increased private policing costs and was addressed by establishing professional police forces. Such forces had been stoutly opposed by the gentry since the Glorious Revolution, on the grounds that they would increase Crown power too much. To make professional police forces palatable to the middle class required reforming both budgets and elections at all levels of governance (national, municipal and county), to lessen crown influence and so ensure taxpayers that their representatives would control the finances of the new forces. Suffrage expansion was part of a broader effort to constrain the executive and was followed almost immediately by substantial investments in the state’s policing capacity.

Keywords: Franchise extension; Democratization; State capacity

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Theories of suffrage expansion can be divided into two broad families. In a family of redistributive theories, broader voting rights lead to a redistribution of income away from the old elite. Thus, suffrage expansions occur only under duress, when the existing elite would otherwise risk an even worse outcome (revolutionary expulsion from power) (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2006; Boix 2003; Przeworski 2009). In a family of collective-action theories, broader voting rights elicit larger contributions to public goods. Suffrage expansions occur only when the existing elite cannot finance some valuable new public project(s) by itself. Common in the study of business corporations (Easterbrook and Fischel 1983), collective-action theories have also been used to explain franchise extensions in polities (Barzel and Kiser 2001; Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Ticchi and Vindigni 2008).

In this paper, we offer a modified collective-action account of Britain’s Great Reform Act, perhaps the most storied of all suffrage adjustments. We agree with the redistributive (aka revolutionary-threat) theorists that British elites sought to restore order in the wake of revolutions on the continent and riots at home. However, we do not believe that Lord Grey’s government offered suffrage rights as a *concession* to deter the middle class from supporting rebellion. Instead, we think suffrage rights were part of a package of reforms that constrained the executive, thereby making the government more credible and increasing its capacity to deal with social disorder (cf. North and Weingast 1989).

During the reform crisis, both Tory and Whig administrations sought to quell disorder by force. However, the Tories operated within the parameters of the unreformed polity’s budget, parliament, and police, whereas the Whigs simultaneously reformed all three of these inter-locking institutions. Within a half decade of the Grey Ministry’s first entry into power (1830), annual budgets had been imposed on all public spending at both the national and municipal levels, taxpayer suffrage had been implemented for elections at both levels, and professional police forces had been founded in all the major towns of England and Wales. The new police represented the single largest new civil expenditure *ever* undertaken
by the municipal corporations and were paid for by new taxes levied by taxpayers’ elected representatives at the local and national levels. Existing revolutionary-threat accounts (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2006; Boix 2003) say nothing about this robust expansion of state policing capacity, while existing collective-action accounts (e.g., Lizzeri and Persico 2004) focus on other, much later expansions in state capacity.

Asking who would have benefited from an effort to enhance the state’s credibility, and hence its capacity, we argue two points. First, those enjoying more of the rents afforded by the unreformed budgetary system (see Foord 1947; Harling 1996) should have opposed the whole reform project. Second, those bearing more of the private policing costs implied by the unreformed police system (on which more below) should have favored the whole reform project. We provide evidence consistent with these expectations from the vote in the House of Commons that brought down Wellington’s Ministry in 1830, the parliamentary election of 1831, and the location and expenditure of the new police. We contrast expectations under a threat theory with ours in each analysis. We also compare our approach with the two main explanations of the Great Reform Act in the political economy literature.

Beyond the case of the Great Reform Act, our account potentially generalizes to other suffrage expansions that occurred after (or simultaneously with) the introduction of comprehensive annual budgets controlled by the legislature (Dincecco 2009). Such expansions should have been (i) incremental and (ii) followed by the provision of new public goods valued by both old and new voters. We provide systematic evidence supporting the first of these implications and qualitative evidence supporting the second in our discussion section. Our account also suggests that instances of democratization can be deeply linked to fundamental concerns about who controls the coercive apparatus of the state. Disorder can increase the value of police as a public good, but in situations without credible guarantees about who controls that coercive power, franchise reform alone may not suffice to provide the good.
Theories of Suffrage Expansion

In this section, we briefly compare revolutionary threat and collective action theories of suffrage expansion, focusing on situations in which incumbent elites face serious social disorder. There are of course other theories of suffrage expansion but these two are prominent in the general literature and in the case at hand.

Threat theorists focus on revolution, arguing that elites choose between repression and concession (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2006; Boix 2003; Przeworski 2009). If the latter is selected, then suffrage rights are offered to potential revolutionaries (or their supporters). This strategy defuses the threat and allows the state to economize on repression. However, there is a cost: the newly enfranchised will use their voting power to pursue redistributive policies at the old elites’ expense.

Collective action theorists, in turn, often focus on interstate war, arguing that incumbent elites face a choice between fighting the war with the state’s existing resources or seeking to expand those resources (Barzel and Kiser 2001; Ticchi and Vindigni 2008). If the latter is selected, suffrage rights are offered to new partners in exchange for their contributions to the war effort. Incumbent elites benefit from the new resources but must share power going forward.

Applied to a situation of domestic disorder, collective action theory would envision elites choosing between quelling the masses using the state’s existing resources, or quelling them by enfranchising new partners in exchange for new resources. Thus, suffrage expansion helps to finance repression. This view is quite different from threat theory, in which suffrage expansion helps economize on repression. In other words, one theory predicts that investment in repression should expand with suffrage rights, while the other one predicts the opposite.

Another important difference between the theories concerns redistribution. In threat theory, both the elites and the newly enfranchised expect redistribution to occur; indeed,
that is why suffrage expansion defuses the revolutionary threat. In collective action theory, in contrast, redistribution is a nuisance. The incumbent elites would prefer to focus their new partners’ minds on the project they both value (restoring social order) rather than on a project that potentially divides them (redistribution). Thus, under collective action theory, one expects elites to expand the suffrage in a way that limits opportunities for redistribution.

In this paper, we consider the UK’s first reform act. We envision British elites, when they faced social disorder, as choosing one of three options: (1) a “concessionary” suffrage expansion (as in threat theory); (2) repression using the regime’s status quo resources; or (3) a “state-building” suffrage expansion intended to attract additional resources (as in collective action theory).

Our theoretical account of the 1832 reform contends that elites chose to extend the franchise as an effort in state-building, in line with the last of the three options. However, as we detail in the subsequent two sections, such an explanation is still insufficient to account for key empirical regularities of the era. To set the stage for our account of reform, we document those empirical regularities, and introduce an additional threat faced by elites.

The Threat from Below

Both the threat and collective action theories of suffrage reform outlined above posit a threat from below. In this Section, we document the existence of such a threat in Britain from 1750 until the first reform act, as other scholars have shown. However, we also document a puzzle for existing theories: the absence of a relationship between that threat and attempts to expand the franchise.

To document the incidence of social disorder in Britain, we use a yearly count of the frequency with which British newspapers used the word “riot.” Our counts correlate highly (a correlation coefficient of .76) with Tilly’s previous riot counts (Horn and Tilly, 2009).
However, we cover all of England back to 1750, whereas Tilly covered only the south of England for the 19th century. As Figure 1 shows, the UK experienced considerable disorder in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was “an aristocracy tempered by riot,” as Trevelyan famously described it (1926, p. 553). Certainly, there was enough disorder that elites might have considered either concessionary or state-building reforms.

Figure 1: Trends in newspaper corpus mentions of riots and reform, 1750-1850

Sources: Authors’ calculations based on word searches in *The Times* and th *Eighteen Century Burney Newspaper’s Collection*. See the notes below for more details.

Notes: The above plot presents the trends in keyword mentions in major newspaper collections from 1750 to 1850. The trends are normalized by the number of documents to reflect the secular trend in newspaper growth during the period. The search term for reform was “parliamentary reform” and the search term for riots was simply “riots.” We exclude mentions of “France” for the riot series account to eliminate discussions of continental riots (like the Shelbourne riots of 1784) that did not represent within-Britain disorder. The vertical line indicates the passage of the 1832 Great Reform Act.

Figure 1 also plots newspaper mentions of “parliamentary reform,” showing that no correlation existed between rioting and discussion of reform in the eighty years prior to the reform crisis. There is similarly no correlation between rioting and reform proposals in parliament. Our findings corroborate Morrison’s (2011) observation that social disorder, even when more severe than that experienced during the reform crisis, was not associated with serious consideration of reform before the 1830s.

To confirm the lack of correlation visually apparent in Figure 1, we regressed either reform mentions, or reform bills, on various lagged counts of riots (for details, see the web appendix). In the appendix we also detail the construction of our riot variable and show that previous continental revolutions (1792, 1820) did not predict reform proposals either.
So, we have a puzzle for both theories. British elites faced endemic rioting, yet they neither enfranchised new partners to help finance greater repression nor conceded suffrage to buy off the rebellious. Indeed when riots broke out, reform was barely considered. An explanation of the first reform act, therefore, must explain why suffrage expansion did not occur before 1832 despite a threat from below that consistently reared its head. Thus, we argue that it is necessary to take seriously a competing risk that pro-reform MPs perceived: the threat from above.

The Threat From Above

The state is a double-edged sword, capable of both protecting and repressing. Thus, decisions about whether to invest in the state’s coercive apparatus are often fraught. Elites who invest in such an apparatus may find themselves threatened by it in turn—that is, threatened from above by the state itself. In this Section, we contend that prior to 1832, the British state lacked the credibility not to use investments made in coercive apparatus to quell the violent masses—e.g. police—against the very elite who brought them into being. Therefore, the missing link between the threat from below and the extension of suffrage to new elites in a collective-action account of the Great Reform Act, was a means of credibly bringing repression under the control of those who invested in it.

North and Weingast (1989) famously argued that the Glorious Revolution of 1689 broadly enhanced state credibility, thereby sparking Britain’s economic and military rise. The post-Revolution state, however, had two distinct components. The fiscal-military component, financed by a budget subject to annual approval by parliament, became more credible. The civil component, still financed by a lifetime “Civil List” grant to the Crown, was no more credible than it had been before the Revolution. The monarch retained full discretion over how to spend Civil List revenues and was not required to inform the House of Commons in
any way until almost a century later (cf. Redlich 1908, vol. III, p. 162; Chester 1981, p. 78). The resulting expenditures ranged between 27% and 35% of total current expenditures in the peacetime years 1699-1701, a considerable amount of money.

Rents

Leveraging his financial independence, the monarch routinely allowed ministers to use sinecures, pensions, government contracts, Church preferments and many other inducements — constituting what contemporaries called “the influence of the Crown” — to secure MPs’ loyalty (Foord 1947; Harling 1996). Since the Crown controlled both civil patronage and the Civil List — the “fountain from which all blessings flowed” (Reitan 1966, p. 323) — ministers could and did shower rents on their supporters. Indeed, “government bureaucrats and placemen,” along with other appointees such as “Anglican clerics, soldiers, ... and judges” accounted for a significantly greater percent of British half-millionaires under the unreformed than the reformed polity (Rubinstein 1983, p. 55).

The absence of police

Because they could neither defund the civil state, nor dismiss the Crown appointees who staffed it, MPs refused to create centralized civil bureaucracies (Cox 2018). Opposition to centrally controlled civil bureaucracies was most adamant regarding police forces. Louis XIV had established a professional police force in Paris in the 1660s and many continental powers subsequently set up urban forces on the Paris model. However, the “state constabularies, not only in France, Germany and Russia but also in Austria, Spain, Italy, and even in liberal Holland and Belgium, served the negative function for Englishmen of models that were to be avoided, not emulated” (Palmer 1988, p. 18).
British elites believed continental police forces had disciplined the lower orders but that they had also trampled elite liberties and had thus been instrumental in establishing royal absolutism (Philips 1980; Palmer 1988; Emsley 1991; Hay 2017). In thinking through the trade-off that professional police entailed—better control of the lower orders versus larger risks to their own interests—the English gentry decided they feared the Crown more than the mob. As the Abbé le Blanc reported in 1737 during his travels, “the English said they ‘had rather be robb’d . . . by wretches of desperate fortune than by [government] ministers’” (Palmer 1988, p. 72).²

To avoid central control over domestic policing, the gentry insisted that order should be kept through the voluntary, unpaid and decentralized efforts of country squires (Wasson 1985). Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig opposition, expressed the traditional view in 1792 during a parliamentary debate:

The police of this country was well administered . . . by gentlemen who undertook to discharge the duty without deriving any emolument from it, and in the safest way to the freedom of the subject, because those gentlemen being under no particular obligation to the executive power, could have no particular interest in perverting the law to oppression.

How deeply the gentry opposed police can be illustrated by considering the Gordon riots of 1780, “nearly a week of unchecked, appalling rioting” in London (Lawrence 2014, p. xi). When the government, in response, sought to establish a paid police force in the metropolis, they faced withering opposition based on the threat to English liberties that such a force would represent (Philips 1980, pp. 166-67).³

The absence of professional police forces meant that local elites had to maintain order in their own locales, entailing several types of cost. One type of cost was unpaid labor, such

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²The trade-off between fear of state predation and fear of rebellion in building state capacity has been recently considered by, among others, Bates (2006) and Ansell and Samuels (2014).

³As Hay (2017) notes, another example of the typical parliamentary opposition to the extension of professional policing can be found in Sir Francis Burdett’s comments in Parliamentary Debates, Commons, 18 January 1812. Vol. 21, Para. 212.
as service as a magistrate or in the Yeomanry Cavalry. The latter were volunteer corps that turned out frequently under the orders of magistrates to control social disturbances, including enclosure protests, food riots, Luddites, as well as disaffected demobilized servicemen (Teichman 1940; Hay 2017). Another type of cost was property damage (Voth and Caprettini 2017). Finally, there were the dues paid to thousands of private associations which helped to catch and prosecute offenders, as well as insure members’ losses (Philips 1993; Koyama 2014; Hay 2017). The expenses associated with keeping the peace varied widely across the elite, depending on the location of their estates. Moreover, as we shall show below, private costs surged during the reform crisis.

Thus, contrary to the standard theories of suffrage, which tend to merely dichotomize the politically relevant population into a unitary elite against the masses, we view the British elite as divided into factions with differing relationships to monarch’s financial power. As a consequence, pro-reform MPs had to manage not just a threat from below, but also a threat from above. The presence of the latter threat considerably delayed a more forceful response to the former threat, as we argue below. When Whig reformers returned to power in 1830, however, they were able to deal with both threats at once.

Our Account of the Great Reform Act

Having introduced the two threats that British elites faced — the riotous lower orders and their still-unconstrained monarch — we can describe how parliamentary reform finally arrived. We argue that, when the Whigs came to power, they first addressed the threat from above. Their first major enactment — the Civil List Act 1831 — reformed the budget, improving the House of Commons’ control over civil spending. Their second major effort — the Representation of the People Act 1832 — reduced the electoral influence of the crown and the patronal peers.
Therefore, the Whigs increased MPs’ power over the purse while reducing their electoral dependence on the crown and its aristocratic allies, in pursuit of two long-held goals. Because these two acts were effective in reducing the influence of the crown, their passage made it politically feasible to propose police reform. Within a year of coming to power, and six months before the Great Reform Act passed, the Whigs announced their intention to introduce professional police forces under central supervision (in the King’s Speech of December 1831). A few years later, they succeeded in enacting a sweeping reform of urban policing.

The Whigs’ Reform Agenda

As our short synopsis (expanded below) makes clear, we view suffrage expansion as one part of a broad reform agenda that tackled two distinct threats — from above and from below. We do not argue that everyone anticipated that the Whigs would reform the police prior to December 1831. However, we think it is plausible that some did, and we provide various kinds of indirect evidence consistent with this conjecture below. To the extent that the Whigs’ ambitions to reform the police were anticipated, one can say that their suffrage reforms were part of a package aimed at recruiting middle-class allies to help finance a more robust state response to social disorder. In this Section, we outline the national, municipal and county reforms that addressed the threat from above and the threat from below.

National reforms

Table I Panel A, lists the Whigs’ main proposals to reform national institutions under three headings—budgetary, electoral and police. The Whigs used a motion to investigate the Civil List, rather than a motion to reform parliament, as their preferred vehicle to bring down Wellington’s government. In other words, their first proposal sought to limit the crown’s financial independence, not to subdue the masses.
### Table 1: The Whig reform agenda in England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act of Parliament (or Proposal)</th>
<th>Budgetary Reform</th>
<th>Electoral Reform</th>
<th>Police Reform</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Reforms of national institutions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil List Act, 1831</td>
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<td>Great Reform Act, 1832</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Boundaries Act, 1832</td>
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<td>Melbourne’s proposal on national police, 1832</td>
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<td><strong>B. Reforms of municipal institutions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighting and Watching Act, 1833</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipal Corporations Act, 1835</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Reforms of county institutions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>County Rates Act, 1834</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A bill to establish councils for the management of county rates in England and Wales, 1837-8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Police Act, 1839</td>
<td>✓</td>
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**Notes:** The table lists the major proposals promoted by the Whigs to reform national, municipal and county institutions in England and Wales. The Whigs promoted similar reforms in Scotland (e.g., the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act of 1833) and at other levels of local government in England and Wales (e.g., Hobhouse’s Vestries Act of 1831).

Once in power, the Grey Ministry quickly enacted the Civil List Act 1831 (1 Wm IV, c. 25). This act ensured that all expenses of the civilian government would henceforth be subject to parliamentary scrutiny, appropriation and audit. Annual expenses of “no less than £696,000 [were] brought within the cognizance and control of Parliament” (Chester 1981, p. 190).

Reducing the Crown’s unilateral budgetary control had been a central principle of Whig thought since the Glorious Revolution (Roberts 1966; North and Weingast 1989). In the aftermath of the American Revolution, Edmund Burke’s Civil List Act of 1782 renewed the Whigs’ commitment to budgetary reform, inaugurating a half century of incremental efforts to put the Civil List under parliamentary control (Reitan 1966; Wasson 1985; Harling 1996; Morrison 2011). The Civil List Act of 1831 completed this reform project, assuring that the House of Commons would control the entire budget.

As regards electoral reform, one of the Whigs’ chief objective was to reduce the number of
"rotten" boroughs controlled by patronal peers. They wholly abolished 56 of these boroughs and reduced the number of seats in others. Relatedly, the ministry proposed a pure taxpayer suffrage, which involved disenfranchising existing poor voters and enfranchising taxpayers who currently lacked voting rights. Since the poor were often politically subservient to their landlords, allowing them to continue to vote would help sustain patronal influence. Meanwhile, taxpayers were viewed as more likely to be "independent" voters.

Allowing the poor to vote would also have diluted middle-class property owners’ control — not something the Whigs should have wanted to do if they were seeking to forge a partnership. To show that contemporaries understood that enfranchising the poor weakened the middle class's electoral control, consider Napoleon III's “poison pill” strategy in 1850. Facing demands for legislative control over state spending, Napoleon III pre-emptively instituted universal manhood suffrage. Once the poor could vote, middle-class property owners were much less interested in ensuring that elected representatives could control the budget, since those representatives were much less likely to serve middle-class interests (Pittaluga et al. 2015).

The Whigs flipped Napoleon III’s strategy — disenfranchising existing poor voters in order to give taxpayers undiluted control over elections. This meant that the new budgetary powers the Whigs had just conferred upon MPs would be more reliably exercised in taxpayers' interests. Indeed, the Whigs disenfranchised enough poor so that electorates shrank in one-third of parliamentary constituencies (Salmon 2009). Previous accounts have largely ignored the significant element of disenfranchisement that the Great Reform Act entailed. Moreover, the reorganization of constituency enfranchisement—to those growing industrial towns—also aligned suffrage with precisely those places that lacked traditional means of repression (Reiner, 2010).

Taxpayer suffrage also made partisan political sense, since the majority of existing poor voters supported the Tories (Salmon 2009). While Tory-sponsored amendments saved the
votes of some poor voters, the enacted reform still disenfranchised large numbers of poor voters and approximated the original goal of *suffrage censitaire*.

After their national-level budgetary reforms had been completed and their electoral reforms were under way, the Grey Ministry announced their intention to investigate “the best means of improving the Municipal Police of the kingdom” in the King’s Speech of December 1831 (Philips and Storch 1994, p. 79). Several months later, Lord Melbourne (the Home Secretary) circulated a bold plan to create a national police force among his ministerial colleagues (Philips and Storch 1999), the budget of which would have been controlled by parliament. However, the cabinet opted for a more decentralized approach to urban policing, as described next.

**Municipal Reforms**

While institutional reforms were sequenced at the national level—budgets first, then elections, then police—they were simultaneous at the municipal level (see Panel B of Table 1). Soon after passage of the Great Reform Act, the Lighting and Watching Act of 1833 offered simultaneous budgetary, suffrage and police reforms to the unincorporated towns in England and Wales. The Burgh Police (Scotland) Act of 1833 offered similar but more ambitious reforms for the Scottish burghs. Two years later, the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 reformed 178 English and Welsh boroughs, requiring that (1) the borough’s taxpayers elect the town council; (2) the town council approve an annual and auditable budget; and (3) the town council establish, pay, and regulate a constabulary force. Although Lord John Russell judged that the budgetary provisions were “the most important part, no doubt” of the bill, they attracted little discussion and no amendments. Similarly, the “very important” police provisions were not controversial.\(^4\) Given the security afforded by the electoral and budgetary reforms, Country MPs who previously “would not tolerate even the idea of a

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\(^4\) H C Debates xxviii, p. 554.
police force” supervised by Crown ministers (Hay 1975, p. 18) now sanctioned the creation of centrally supervised police forces in every major town.

It is important to stress that the Whigs’ urban policing measures were not simply corollaries of Sir Robert Peel’s famous Metropolitan Police Act (1829). That act financed a metropolitan police force while leaving the Civil List intact and thus preserving the unreformed budgetary system. In order to address traditional worries that police would increase Crown influence, the act established a separate Receiver to handle all monies funding the police; and subjected the Receiver’s accounts to annual parliamentary scrutiny (Lyman 1964, pp. 150-151). Fiscally speaking, then, the metropolitan police were paid in the same way that the armed forces were.

Some contemporaries advocated financing police in the provincial towns on the same model. For example, a pamphlet published by Montague Gore (soon to be a Whig MP), and recounted in The Times on 14 January 1832, proposed

the establishment of a police force similar to that of London, in all considerable towns... [In] answer to the objection of such a measure placing too much power in the hands of the Crown, [Mr Gore recommended] that the Police Bill, like the Mutiny Bill, should be made annual, and thus the real control and authority over the new force be vested in the legislature.

In contrast to Gore’s approach, the Grey Ministry proposed a more radical way to finance the police. They first abolished all unreformed budgets at both the national and municipal levels, replacing them with annual and auditable budgets. They then financed the new police using a combination of local rates approved by town councilors and central transfers approved by MPs.

It is important also to note that the new police represented a major new expense. Look-

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5 A previous attempt at such a police force in 1785 had provoked “ferocious hostility” from the City of London under concerns about funding, accountability and liberty (Emsley, 1991).

6 The Times (London, England), Saturday, 14 January 1832, page 4; Issue 14748. The Mutiny Bill was a measure, passed each year, that stipulated the size and funding of the English (and then the British) Army. Whig theorists viewed it as a central factor in preserving liberty, since funding lapsed unless a new bill was enacted.
ing at the costs paid through local taxation, 81 boroughs that established police forces in 1836 pursuant to the Municipal Corporations Act (1835) reported their expenditures to parliament. On average, police expenses constituted 23% of each borough’s total. Assuming that other municipal expenses did not change between 1835 and 1837 (consistent with historical accounts such as MacDonagh 1977), this implies that police expenses caused an immediate 30% increase in borough expenditures, on average. This was by far the largest new civil expenditure program ever undertaken by the municipal corporations. Indeed, from the Revolution to the reform era, the municipal corporations were rarely entrusted with new duties by local taxpayers, who almost invariably preferred to set up special-purpose units of government whose budgets they could control (MacDonagh 1977; Cox 2018).

The central government also shouldered a portion of police-related expenses, as it hired central staff in order to exercise the Home Secretary’s supervisory role and made fiscal transfers. While we are not aware of a detailed accounting of these expenses, it is worth noting that the central government’s total civil expenditures, expressed as a percentage of GDP, declined on average by 4.7 percentage points per year in the last twenty years before the Municipal Reform Act, and increased on average by 1.0 percentage points per year in the first twenty years after. A structural breaks test (a Wald supremum test) is consistent with the hypothesis that a break in civil spending occurred in 1836.

**County reforms**

At the county level (see Panel C), the Whigs first reformed budgetary procedures (via the County Rates Act 1834) and then sought to renovate county governance along the lines of

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7 See The ABSTRACT OF THE STATEMENT OF MONIES received and expended on account of certain BOROUGHS in England and Wales for 1837.

8 The spending data for these calculations are from Mitchell (1988, pp. 578-80, 587-89). The GDP data are from Thomas and Dimsdale (2016). An agnostic test puts the break year in 1838, which may reflect the fact that only 81 of 178 reformed boroughs had set up their police forces in 1836. As the others followed, the center’s costs would have increased.
their earlier municipal reforms. Although their 1837-38 proposal failed, the County Police Act (1839) enabled counties to form police forces, something that about half promptly did. Thus, within a decade of the Grey Ministry’s entry into power, all boroughs and half the counties had established police forces; middle-class property owners were paying most of the taxes to support these forces through local rates and national taxes; and middle-class voters were reasonably assured that these forces would not become tools of royal (or executive) oppression, since their elected representatives had a firm grip on the purse strings.

Summary

The Whigs’ commitment to budgetary reform was well known before the Grey Ministry came to power. Ministers announced their intention to proceed with parliamentary reform as soon as they came to power, and about a year later declared their ambition to reform the police as well. Subsequently, at all levels of government, they sought to establish annual budgets, taxpayer suffrage, and professional police forces subject to supervision by the Home Secretary. The Ministry never proposed reforming suffrage rights pertaining to a level of government whose budgets remained unreformed. Nor did they ever propose establishing police forces in units of government that still had unreformed budgets and elections. On four separate occasions, Ministers packaged budgetary, electoral and police reforms together in single bills.

Our interpretation is that the Whigs were constructing a polity in which taxpayers would control the election of MPs, who in turn would control the expenditure of public monies, thereby ensuring that police forces (and other public services) would not be controlled by unaccountable (local or national) executives. Our account is similar to those that view the Great Reform Act as sealing an alliance between the aristocracy and the middle class. For

\[9\] In the web appendix, we list all “economical reform” (or budgetary reform) enactments from the 1780s to the reform era, showing that they were all supported by the Whigs.
example, Gash (1979, p. 147) argued that “the primary purpose of the Reform Bill...was to rally middle-class support round the aristocratic system.” We differ from such traditional accounts primarily by focusing on the main immediate goal that an alliance between the aristocracy and middle classes would have had—the restoration and maintenance of social order—and the main institution through which they could achieve that common goal – the new police.

In revolutionary-threat theories, expenditure on a state’s repressive apparatus is a substitute for expanding the suffrage. The state can restore order either by conceding new suffrage rights (in which case it can spend less on repression) or by increasing repression (in which case it can preserve the existing electorate).

In our account, taxpayer suffrage—achieved by enfranchising the non-voting rich and disenfranchising the voting poor—allowed the state to credibly commit to its taxpayers (when combined with budgetary reforms). Thus, adjusting suffrage rights was a complement to—indeed, a necessary pre-condition for—re-organizing and re-financing the state’s repressive efforts.

**Riots and Reform**

In the rest of the paper, we explore the mechanism by which threats from below (operationally measured by riots) translated into elite support for suffrage reform. Under threat theory, more rioting causes elites to revise their risk assessments — the probability of a successful revolution — upward, making them more willing to concede reform. In an influential study, Aidt and Franck (2015) argue that MPs whose constituencies experienced more nearby Swing riots had higher risk assessments and, thus, higher propensities to support the Whigs (the party of reform).

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10 Our case study resonates with the broader analysis of Ferejohn and Rosenbluth (2017), who similarly emphasize that military threats (in their case, international) can in some circumstances induce elites to bring other social elements into partnership via ‘democratic’ reforms.
We envision a different mediating variable. Nearby rioting should have increased the *private policing costs* that individual elites bore. We begin by demonstrating that the Swing riots did in fact cause substantial increases in private policing costs. We then trace how these higher private costs affected voting behavior at three crucial stages of the reform process: how MPs voted in the vote of no confidence that brought down Wellington's ministry in 1830; how citizens voted in the 1831 election that gave the Whigs the majority they needed to push their reform bill through the House of Commons; and how city councils voted in 1836-37, when setting the initial budgets for the new urban police forces that the Whigs mandated.

By looking at three distinct stages in the reform process, it becomes easier to discern which mediating variable — risk assessment or private cost — is doing the work. For example, under threat theory, the revolutionary threat should dissipate after suffrage reform. Thus, any connection between rioting in 1830-31 and police expenditures in 1836-37 cannot be mediated by risk assessments, since those should all have diminished to a common low level. We discuss the plausibility of each mediating variable for each of our analyses below.

**The private costs of the Swing riots**

In late July 1830, an uprising in Paris overthrew King Charles X. In addition to provoking an immediate and sharp increase in British Consol yields (Dasgupta and Ziblatt 2015, p. 16), the Paris uprising sparked several revolutions on the continent and likely inspired the Swing riots, a wave of rural disturbances that began a month later (Quinault 1994, p. 389-390). The Swing riots were vast; Holland (2005) documents some 2,818 distinct violent incidents, mostly involving arson, machine breaking, animal maiming, and assault.

We have already explained that the absence of professional police in Britain imposed private policing costs on property owners. It is important to note that the Swing riots of 1830-31 increased those costs.
First, Wellington’s government did not take any action against the rioters until November 11, over two months after the first riot. The government’s inaction was consistent with traditional views on dealing with social disorder: “as [Home Secretary Sir Robert] Peel had written to the Horsham magistrates, the protection of individual properties was their responsibility, not his; and, for the purpose, he urged them to enrol ‘specials’, form voluntary associations and...revive the old corps of Yeomanry Cavalry” (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1968, p. 254).

Figure 2 shows the sums that were actually expended for the Yeomanry and Volunteer Corps in England and Scotland from 1816 to 1842. An early spike in expenditures corresponds to 1820, after the disaster of Peterloo. A significant reduction in expenditures took place in 1828, after Canning’s government decided to eliminate corps that had not been called out in aid of the civil power within the previous ten years. The Yeomanry disbandments, however, had to be reversed three years later to cope with the Swing Riots of 1830. Annual expenditures rose by roughly 220% in 1831, compared to a 59% increase in 1820.

Figure 2: Expenditures for the Yeomanry Corps in England and Scotland, 1816-1842

![Figure 2: Expenditures for the Yeomanry Corps in England and Scotland, 1816-1842](chart.png)

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data collected from British Parliamentary Papers.

Something similar occurred with other private peacekeeping costs. The Report of the
Commissioners for Inquiring into the County Rates (1836) provides data on expenditures by private associations on prosecutions over the period 1830-34. If one focuses on the 21 associations providing data for all five years, one finds that their costs in 1830-31 were 74% larger on average than their costs in 1833-34.

British elites were once again faced with substantial challenges in maintaining order, motivating them once again to consider the possibility of reform. The difference is that the party in power had long advocated budgetary and suffrage reforms that would, if accomplished, make a more robust repressive response to disorder politically feasible.

Wellington’s Fall

By the time the House of Commons assembled for its first meeting after the election of 1830, rioting was peaking and “the government’s inability to restore order in the Tory counties disillusioned its own supporters…” (Quinault 1993, p. 197). Hoping to take advantage of the government’s awkward position, the Whigs moved for an inquiry into the Civil List on 15 November 1830, knowing that their motion was tantamount to a vote of no confidence in the government.

As far as we know, no quantitative analysis of the subsequent vote has been conducted. Here, we focus on the behavior of English MPs. By November 1830, rioting had not yet spread to Wales, and it never did spread to Scotland or Ireland. Of the 482 English MPs still alive and eligible to vote in the Civil List division, 147 (31%) voted against the motion to reform the Civil List, 145 (30%) did not vote, and 190 (39%) voted in favor.

Biographies of those who did not vote indicate that, for many, abstention was intentional. In other words, there were three levels of support for reform: opposition (voting

11 Member biographies can be found at https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/. For some examples of intentional abstention, see the articles on the Hon. George Anson, Thomas Tyrwhitt Drake, and Lord Bath.
against the motion); waffling (not voting); and support (voting for the motion). We conduct ordered probit analyses below, seeking to discern what determined a member’s level of support for reform.\footnote{We coded MPs’ votes from the division list in Hansard’s, checking against each member’s biography at https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/}

In particular, we investigate whether MPs with lower rents and higher policing costs were more likely to support the Whigs’ inaugural reform motion. We estimate the rents each MP enjoyed under the old regime by whether they served in either a “nomination” or a “rotten” borough (using a variable coded by Aidt and Franck 2015). We assess policing costs by counting the number of Swing riots that occurred prior to 15 November 1830 within 10km of each borough or university constituency (using Holland 2005). For county constituencies, we count the total number of riots occurring within county borders prior to 15 November 1830.

In addition to rents and riots, we control for (i) the Whig share of the vote in the 1826 election; (ii) how the constituency’s members voted on Lord John Russell’s motion (of 23 February 1830) to give direct representation to Birmingham, Leeds, and Manchester; and (iii) each MP’s attitude toward Catholic Emancipation (which some historians, such as Clark (1985), argue was a key factor in Wellington’s fall). Since historians often use how each member voted in the division we are studying to decide their partisan affiliation (see, for example, the History of Parliament Project biographies), we do not control for party affiliation at the MP level.

Table 2 shows the results of our analyses (with errors clustered at the constituency level). Looking at the control variables, we see that more votes for the Whigs in the 1826 election, as well as more votes for Russell’s reform motion in parliament, both strongly predicted support for reform of the Civil List (and hence for bringing in a Whig Ministry). However, attitudes toward Catholic Emancipation had no significant effect. MPs from more “rotten”
Table 2: Relationship between the swing riots and the Civil List vote of 15 November 1830

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Civil List Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whig Constituency Vote Share, 1826</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform Support by then-MP, 1830</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotten Borough Index</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Catholic Emancipation</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(1 + Number of Riots)</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County × ln(1 + Number of Riots)</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R-Sqrd</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors robust to clustering at the constituency level presented in parentheses.

Notes: The above table presents the results from estimating equation $CLvote_i = \alpha + \beta_1whig_i + \beta_2reform_i + \beta_3rotten_i + \beta_4catholic_i + \beta_5\ln(1 + riots_i) + \beta_6county_i + \epsilon_i$ where $i$ indexes the parliamentary constituency. We measure the vote on the Civil List ($CLvote$) as -1 for a vote against, 0 for no vote, and 1 for a vote in favor. We use ordered probit to estimate the above equation. Our sample are the 482 English MPs eligible to vote in the division, and we cluster our standard errors to reflect the 282 constituencies with MPs voting. The variables for the Whig share of the constituency vote in 1826 ($whig$), Support for Russel’s reform in 1830 ($reform$) and the index for the rottenness ($rotten$) of the borough are from Aidt and Franck (2015). MP support for Catholic Emancipation ($catholic$) was coded by the authors from History of Parliament Project Biographies. The number of riots ($riots$) is the number of Swing Riots in the county measured before the Civil List vote date (5 November 1830) from data provided by Holland (2005). We take add 1 before taking the natural log since some counties did not experience the Swing Riots.

... (rest of the text)
how non-county MPs voted. This may reflect the fact that few boroughs had experienced any “riot treatment” by the time of the division under study. In any event, all that we can claim at this point is that support for the Civil List motion among county MPs was significantly associated with the number of Swing riots that each county had experienced by 15 November 1830. This is consistent with our hypothesis that local elites who bore higher private protection costs under the unreformed policing system were more likely to support bringing in a Whig Ministry. Some of these MPs may simply have been dissatisfied with Wellington’s handling of the riots; others may have thought the Whigs would mount a more effective response within the confines of the unreformed polity; and still others may already have realized that the Whigs were likely to establish new police forces (Philips and Storch 1994).

Is it possible to interpret our results as supporting threat theory? Did nearby riots increase MPs’ risk assessments, which in turn affected their votes? Prior to the vote on 15 November, newspaper coverage of the Swing riots was scant and never suggested that the rioting had any revolutionary potential. This was not because the newspapers were shy about discussing revolution. They frequently ran articles about revolution — but none of them mentioned the Swing riots. If contemporaries did view the Swing riots as increasing the risk of revolution, then the lack of newspaper coverage and the government’s inaction until November 11 are very hard to understand. Thus, the mechanism generating the correlation we find between rioting and MPs’ votes against Wellington was much more likely the raising of private costs of protection, rather than any revision of revolutionary threat perceptions.

1371% of the boroughs had not experienced any nearby riot by 15 November 1830; and only 5% had experienced five or more. In contrast, riot exposure in the counties varied widely, allowing one to assess their impact with more confidence.
The 1831 Election

The peak of Swing rioting occurred in November and December of 1830. Thus, by examining events in 1831 we can assess how elites responded after the bulk of the riots had occurred. In particular, we consider the election of 1831, held between April 28 and June 1.\footnote{In this era, elections were held over several weeks, not on a single day.}

Aidt and Franck (2015) have already shown that the pro-Whig vote swing from 1830 to 1831 was substantially blunted in “nomination” and “rotten” boroughs. Since the patrons of such boroughs tended to receive a higher share of the unreformed system’s rents, the MPs they nominated tended to oppose reform.

Aidt and Franck also persuasively show that the Whigs posted stronger electoral gains in constituencies that were exposed to more Swing riots (cumulatively, prior to the election). Their OLS results indicate that “exposure to one additional riot within a radius of 10km from a constituency increased the share of Whigs elected in that constituency by 0.47 percentage points relative to past Whig support” (p. 526). Were a constituency to move from the first quartile of riot exposure to the third, the share of seats won by the Whigs would increase by 5.2 percentage points. Their instrumental-variables results (which can be interpreted as causal) suggest even stronger effects.

Our interpretation is that elites experiencing a higher riot intensity in their own locale (prior to the election of 1831) should have faced higher private costs of property protection and, thus, should have become more likely to support the Whigs. Some might have retrospectively rewarded the Whigs for Lord Melbourne’s vigorous suppression of the Swing riots in the half year he had been Home Secretary (Brock 1973, p. 134). Others might have anticipated that the Whigs would pursue police reform, as indeed they began to do early in the first session of the reformed parliament.

Aidt and Franck view their results differently. They assume that elites nearer to Swing...
rioting perceived a higher threat of rebellion than more distant elites (p. 506), and thus interpret their results as supporting revolutionary-threat theory. We see two main problems with this interpretation.

First, it is not clear why elites exposed to more riots could not persuade elites exposed to fewer riots that a serious revolutionary threat existed. In standard models, asymmetric private information can survive only if informed actors cannot credibly communicate with uninformed actors (Fearon 1995). We know that British elites had many opportunities to discuss threats facing the regime. They wrote innumerable letters, read the same newspaper articles and parliamentary reports, and attended the same parliamentary debates. Thus, estimates of the regime’s probability of survival should have been uniform among elites, regardless of how many riots they personally witnessed, unless there was some inability to communicate credibly. Aidt and Franck’s interpretation implicitly relies on the existence of such an impediment but no one has explicitly argued that one existed.

Second, as noted in the previous section, newspapers did not depict the Swing riots as contributing to a revolutionary threat. Moreover, had there been a significant risk of regime overthrow, then investors should have decreased their holdings of regime-dependent securities — such as pound sterling notes, British Consols, and Bank of England stock — as these might become worthless after revolutionaries seized power. However, that is not how investors behaved (Cox and Saiegh 2019)\(^{15}\).

**The Swing Riots and the New Police**

We have argued that the Swing riots increased the private policing costs that some elites bore, thus increasing their demand for professional police forces paid by a broader tax base.

\(^{15}\)Aidt and Franck (2019) have also investigated how English MPs voted in the division that precipitated the 1831 election. Their analysis does not bear on our hypothesis — that local rioting increased local elites’ private costs, thus generating support for reform—because they measure violent events only at the county level.
If this account is valid, then areas experiencing more intense rioting should have taken up the Whigs’ police reforms with greater alacrity. In this section, we show that this was the case.

Although all were required to establish police forces by the Municipal Reform Act (1835), how much boroughs spent on their new forces was left up to their respective town councils. In this section, we examine 147 provincial English towns that had no police forces prior to 1836 and reported their expenditures to parliament in 1837-38. We exclude London, which established a force in 1829, as well as 11 provincial towns that established police forces via special acts prior to municipal reform. For each of the included boroughs, we know that they spent nothing on professional police forces before 1835, but (potentially) spent non-zero amounts in 1837 and 1838. We measure our outcome as per capita police-related expenditure \((\text{expenditure}_{it})\) in borough \(i\) and year \(t\)\(^{16}\)

We model this expenditure as depending on two main factors that affected local property owners’ demand for protection. First, more populous towns tended to have greater urban crime, which we would expect to increase demand for police services. Thus, we include \(\ln(\text{pop}_{it})\), the logged population of borough \(i\) in the 1831 census, and linearly interpolated for 1837 and 1838 (bracketing by 1831 and 1841). Second, to assess whether towns with more tumultuous hinterlands spent more, we include \(\ln(1 + \text{rioters}_{30km_i})\), the logged number of Swing offenders within 30km of each borough in 1830-31 (plus 1) interacted with an indicator equal to 1 \((\text{post}_t)\) in the years after the municipal reform was passed\(^{17}\)

All boroughs included in our analysis were on a parallel trend of expenditure on pro-

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\(^{16}\)Our data are from the *Abstract of the statement of monies received and expended on account of certain boroughs in England and Wales for 1837*, and the same title for 1838. Note that the sample of municipal boroughs in this analysis is very different than the sample of parliamentary boroughs considered in Table 2.

\(^{17}\)Specifically we look at post-1837 since this is the first post-reform year that we have data available. The data on rioters is the total (apprehended) Swing Riot offenders as geolocated from Holland’s data. In ArcGIs, we located municipal boroughs, and calculated the percentage of the geolocated offenders within a given concentric distance from the borough. Note that this measure of rioters is distinct from the number of riot incidents.
fessional police — none at all — prior to 1835. In that year, the Municipal Reform Act required all of them to create professional police forces. Insofar as that Act was exogenous to any individual municipal borough, we would not expect the potential outcomes of municipal expenditure to differ across the boroughs. Our specification includes municipality fixed effects that account for any time-invariant municipality-level features that might have affected police expenditures. But we must still assume that no factors, other than population, varied overtime and affected both riot exposure and police expenditure.

Table 3, Model 1, displays our main results (with cluster-robust standard errors). The constant term reveals that boroughs with the smallest populations (1,500) and no nearby riots spent virtually nothing on the police before the reform, confirming that boroughs included in the sample were on a parallel trend. Regarding the relationship between riot exposure and post-reform police expenditures, a natural way to assess their interaction is to measure the extent to which the effect of these two factors together exceeds the effect of each considered individually. In this case, because there were no expenditures on professional police prior to 1835, the combined effect of both factors, the coefficient $\beta_3$, necessarily exceeds the product of the effects of these factors considered separately.

In terms of these factors’ individual effects, the results indicate that boroughs that did not experience any riots within 30km in 1830-31 increased their total per-capita police-related expenditures by 0.017 pounds in the years after the municipal reform was passed. To assess the additive effect of riots, we estimate the predicted post-reform expenditures setting the different rioters measures at their mean values. Next, we compute the marginal effect of riot

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$^{18}$This is certainly true in terms of expenditure on professional police subject to central supervision. If we loosen the definition of “professional” police to any officer (e.g., a constable or serjeant at mace) given a salary and charged (even if not exclusively) with policing duties, and drop the requirement that they be subject to central supervision, it is still largely true that there was no spending on so-defined police prior to 1835. Examining the first 70 sample boroughs listed in the appendices to the First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in England and Wales (1835)), 80% spent nothing on so-defined police, while another 17% spent less than 20 pounds per annum. Only Oxford (70 pounds) and Bristol (468 pounds) had larger expenditures.
Table 3: Relationship between the swing rioters and urban police expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Police expenditures per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(Population)</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1837</td>
<td>0.017***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(1 + Number of rioters 30km) × Post-1837</td>
<td>0.0032***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(1 + Number of rioters 20km) × Post-1837</td>
<td>0.0027**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(1 + Number of rioters 10km) × Post-1837</td>
<td>0.0027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (Borough x Year)</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Sqrd</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors robust to clustering at the constituency level presented in parentheses.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: The above table presents the results from estimating equation $policeExp_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \ln(population_{it}) + \beta_2 post1835_t + \beta_3 (\ln(1 + rioters_{i}) \times post1837_t) + \epsilon_{it}$, where $i$ indexes the municipal borough and $t$ indexes the year. The sample of boroughs are those in England that had not yet established police forces in 1835 when the Municipal Corporations Act was passed. The sample of years are 1831, 1837 and 1838. Population is available decennially and linearly interpolated for non-decennial years. The dependent variable is measured as total police-related expenditures per capita ($policeExp$), $\alpha_i$ are municipal borough fixed effects, post1837 is an indicator equal to 1 after 1837 and the passage of the reform (note that this is a pooled cross-sectional specification and we don’t take into account different trends, only levels, after the passage of the reform due to our limited data), and rioters measures the number of Swing Riot offenders (i.e. rioters) detained within a given concentric distance from the municipal borough.

exposure as the difference between the predicted outcomes and the estimated post-reform expenditures of boroughs without any riots in 1830-31. Consider the case of boroughs where at least one Swing Riot offender was detained within a 30km radius. The mean value of the variable $\ln(1 + rioters_{i})$ is 4.19. The associated linear prediction of the total per-capita police-related expenditures for such a representative borough amounts to .0304 pounds (with a .003 standard deviation) in the years after the municipal reform was passed. These results reveal that the post-1837 increase in per-capita police-related expenditures was roughly 77% higher in towns that experienced an average amount of riots within a 30km radius in 1830-31 relative to boroughs without any riot exposure.

In Models 2 and 3, we repeat the analysis using the number of Swing riots within 20km
and 10km, respectively. The results are very similar, regardless of which measure of riot intensity we use. In terms of riots’ additive effects the mean values of the variables $\ln(1 + \text{rioters}_{20\text{km}})$ and $\ln(1 + \text{rioters}_{10\text{km}})$ are 2.86 and 1.31, respectively. The associated linear predictions of the total per-capita police-related expenditures for both types of representative boroughs amount to 0.0307 pounds (with a standard deviation of 0.003) in the years after the municipal reform was passed.

We have already noted that rioting in 1830-31 should not affect decisions made after 1832, if threat theory holds, because suffrage expansion should defuse the revolutionary threat. We would also point out, that if riots did increase fears of rebellion among those elites near enough to personally witness their effects, and these fears were not fully removed by suffrage expansion, then such elites could have supported increased funding for the British Army, which was the main institution tasked with quelling rebellion in the unreformed polity (Gash 1979, pp. 5-6). If instead riots increased the private costs born by those elites whose properties were attacked, then affected elites should have become more likely to support the creation of publicly funded police forces. Consistent with this latter hypothesis, we have shown that the local intensity of Swing rioting was associated with higher per-capita police expenditures in the boroughs that established forces after the Municipal Corporations Act (1835).

Reconsidering suffrage expansions

Our analysis suggests some lessons for the study of suffrage expansions more broadly. The main supporting evidence that threat theorists have pointed to is the correlation between revolutionary threats and suffrage expansions visible in the historical record (see, e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2000; Przeworski 2009). However, there are two possible interpretations of this correlation. One, consistent with threat theories, is that suffrage rights were conceded
Table 4: Suffrage Expansions and Investments in Repression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Investment in Repression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Belgian government quadrupled the Civic Guard’s financial support (1897 Law).(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Increase in activities of Northwest Mounted Police force.(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Growth of State police Force (1919).(^c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Large increase in police expenditures (1852).(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Municipality Act sets up the municipal police forces. Creation of National Police (1851).(^d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Passage of first Police Act, New Zealand Armed Constabulary Act (1867).(^e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Creation of the the Ministry of Justice and the Police (1818).(^f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>Establishment of National Guard (1823). Reestablishment of Preventative Police (1824).(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Municipal Guard for Lisbon and Oporto are formed (1834).(^h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>The Guarda Real de Policía is substituted by the Guarda Municipal (Municipal Guard).(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Public Order Act (1870) reorganizes and militarizes the public safety police.(^i)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: \(a\): Draper (2018); \(b\): Tilly et al. (1975); \(c\): Furuhagen (2017); \(d\): Wintle (1996); \(e\): http://www.nzlii.org; \(f\): https://www.regjeringen.no/en/id4/; \(g\): https://www.psp.pt/; \(h\): Kidd (2017); \(i\): https://legishca.edu.umh.es.

to avoid the costs and risks of repression. A second interpretation, consistent with collective action theories, is that suffrage rights were exchanged for help in financing new investments in repression. Deciding which of these competing explanations has more merit in a particular case would require detailed analysis similar to that we have provided here for the Great Reform Act.

Table 4 shows a few examples of investments in repression following suffrage expansions in Europe and its settler colonies. The list does not constitute a representative sample of all such franchise extensions (see Przeworski 2009). Nonetheless, it shows that it was not uncommon for states to make major new investments in policing capacity after expanding the suffrage. This pattern is hard to explain from a revolutionary-threat perspective but consistent with the idea that elites may extend the franchise to obtain help in financing investments in repression.

Another kind of evidence cited by threat theorists is the correlation between elite fears of redistributive taxation and suffrage expansions (Przeworski 2009). Again, there are two possible interpretations. One is that everyone expected that expanding suffrage rights would lead to redistributive taxation, which would help restore order, but some elites thought the
price was too high. Another is that everyone worried about redistributive taxation but, since this was a distraction from the main purpose of suffrage expansion, elites took measures to reduce the amount that actually occurred. In the case at hand, the Whigs took several measures to reduce the risk of redistribution, including disenfranchising poor voters and arranging for local taxes to finance most of the new urban police forces. In other cases, too, one would have to investigate how best to interpret elite warnings about redistributive taxation — since such warnings are not uniquely consistent with threat theory.

Conclusion

We have argued the Great Reform Act was part of a package of reforms intended to build a state that would credibly serve middle-class interests. In particular, political reform offered a way to create professional police forces, fund them with taxes, and put them under ministerial supervision, while assuring the gentry that the resulting forces would not become akin to a standing army under Crown control.

The reforms gave voting rights to middle-class citizens for the same reason that firms offer such rights to prospective share-holders. Investors must be able to check executives’ misuse of funds, else they will not voluntarily invest (Easterbrook and Fischel 1983; Bolton and Dewatripont 2005, p. 527).

Voting rights alone, however, were insufficient. In the unreformed polity, some domestic public services were still financed by funds that lay outside the annual purview of elected representatives. If this state of affairs continued, then voting rights would be of little value to taxpayers in controlling domestic services, because their elected representatives would lack financial control. Thus, both suffrage and budgetary reforms were essential to attract a new infusion of equity from the middle class.

The necessary trio of reforms were offered in quick succession at the national level. The
Grey Ministry first pushed through the Civil List Act (1831), ensuring that MPs would control all public spending. It then pushed through the Great Reform Act (1832), ensuring that the middle class would control MPs’ elections. While the reform bill was still in progress, the Ministry began to consider a scheme for a national police force, before opting to pursue a more decentralized approach.

At the borough level, the Municipal Corporations Act (1835) implemented the analogous reforms all at once. Its budgetary clauses ensured that councilors would control all local spending; its suffrage clauses ensured that middle class voters would control town councilors’ elections; and its police clauses required every borough to establish a professional police force, giving the Home Secretary overall supervisory control.

At the county level, the Whigs enacted budgetary reform (1834), sought electoral reform (1837-38), and then enacted the permissive County Police Act (1839). Within a decade of the initial budgetary-cum-suffrage reforms at the national level in 1831-32, all boroughs and half the counties had established police forces.

A prominent school of democratic theorists, including Acemoglu and Robinson (2000, 2006) and Boix (2003), views elites facing revolutionary challenges as having two mutually exclusive options: repression or (concessionary) reform. In our account of Britain’s reform era, the adjustment of suffrage rights was part of a broader effort to enhance the state’s credibility, allowing an expansion of its repressive capacity vis-a-vis the lower orders. Thus, our account is closer to the political economy literature stressing the connection between state credibility and military capacity (e.g., North and Weingast 1989; Dincecco 2009; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Ferejohn and Rosenbluth 2017); and to theories stressing the importance of endowing equity investors with voting rights (e.g., Easterbrook and Fischel 1983; Bolton and Dewatripont 2005, p. 527; Barzel and Kiser 2001).
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Online Appendix to
“The Political Economy of Suffrage Reform:
The Great Reform Act of 1832”

Appendix is for online publication only.

Date: August 17, 2020

Appendix Contents

A  Riots and Reform in the Newspaper Corpus ......................... page 2
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1 Riots and Reform in the Newspaper Corpus

To more formally evaluate the relationship implied in Figure ?? in the main text of the paper, we consider a simple time series specification in which we relate newspaper corpus mentions of riots, to the total number of bills that considered either suffrage reform or parliamentary reform more generally.

Our simple specification takes the form

\[ reform_t = \alpha + \beta \text{riots}_t + \epsilon_t \] (1)

where \( t \) indexes the year; \( reform_t \) is one of two measures, either the count of reform-related bills considered in parliament, or the percentage of documents in the newspaper corpus that mention reform; and \( \text{riots}_t \) is one of two measures, either the newspaper corpus mentions of riot activity (excluding documents that also mention France), or the post-1800 violent incidents from Horn and Tilly (2009).

The correlations are presented in Table A1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proposed Bills</th>
<th>Newspaper Reform Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \text{riots}_t )</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( -0.31^{**} )</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( (0.13) )</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta(\text{riots}<em>t - \text{riots}</em>{t-1}) )</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( (0.060) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \text{riots}_t ) (Horn &amp; Tilly)</td>
<td>-0.00029</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( (0.0015) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsv. (Years)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year range</td>
<td>1750-1832</td>
<td>1750-1832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
* \( p < 0.1 \), ** \( p < 0.05 \), *** \( p < 0.01 \)
2 Repression of Riots

As Bend (2018) notes, having been out of power for the majority of the early nineteenth century, the Whigs were eager to demonstrate competence in the early months of their minority government. Prime Minister Charles Grey gave Home Secretary Viscount Melbourne ample powers to suppress social unrest, by any and all means: “... Magistrates were advised to swear in special constables; to form local defense associations; military detachments were dispatched to reinforce provincial forces and assisted in the arrest of leaders; royal pardons were offered to supplement local rewards to identify and convict incendiaries; Bow Street officers were dispatched to aid in their detection; and inaction or conciliation to the will of the crowd was severely reprimanded ...” (Bend 2018: 208)

In addition, the Grey Ministry resorted to a 1812 statute that introduced the death penalty for the destruction of machinery to further suppress any serious disturbances. According to Archibald Prentice’s account:

“On the 9th of January [of 1831], judgement of death was recorded against twenty-three prisoners, for the destruction of a paper machine in Buckinghamshire; In Dorset, on the 11th, against three, for extorting money, and two for robbery; at Norwich fifty-five prisoners were convicted of machine breaking and rioting; at Ipswich three of extorting money; at Petworth twenty-six for machine breaking and rioting; at Gloucester upwards of thirty; at Oxford twenty-nine; and at Winchester out of upwards forty convicted six were left for execution. Four of these were afterwards respited; but two of them were executed on the 15th. At Salisbury, forty-four prisoners were convicted, of whom two were executed on the 25th. In the whole upwards of eight hundred of the rioters were tried ... and all of those who were convicted, with the exception of the four cases mentioned, were sentenced to various terms of transportation and imprisonment.” (Prentice 1851: 372-373).

Finally, as noted in the main body of the paper, the 1828 Yeomanry disbandments, were reversed in 1831 to cope with the Swing Riots (see Figure ??)