

Redefining the Nation

Understandings of Political Community and the Politics of the Right to
Vote in 19th Century U.K. and France

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Section I: Introduction

Periods in which changes to the voting qualifications are debated are periods in which the understandings of political belonging are likely to be contested and reconfigured. If the right to vote signifies full membership in the political community, then political coalitions that seek to expand or contract the franchise will be especially likely to defend and recommend their proposals in language that emphasizes the proper boundaries and base for membership. This coincidence has resulted in two relatively distinct scholarly tendencies: (1) works that examine how debates over the franchise were situated in and constitutive of broader processes of community re-definition, and (2) works (primarily in political science) that treat the ideas of political community as epiphenomenal and of little causal consequence. There is merit to both of these positions, although as I will demonstrate, the former captures key dimensions to democratization that the political science literature on the subject largely ignores.

In this paper I offer a critique of the epiphenomenal claim by highlighting one way in which the ideas of political community shape changes to the franchise. Those works that have focused on the re-definition of the political community have emphasized broad social and economic transformations and changing political discourse as the matrix from which changes to the suffrage emerge. Keith McClelland argues that the “discursive emergence of the ‘respectable and independent’ man and his positioning as a new political subject” is crucial for understanding working class reformers’ move away from the manhood suffrage advocated by the earlier Chartists to an embrace of a male householder franchise (2000, 102). The emergence of this new political subject, however, can only be understood in the broader context of the “important social and economic changes which were reshaping the working class” (2000, 102). This approach is more right than wrong.

It does, however, leave itself open to the epiphenomenal critique: that the new political subjects and the reformulation of the ideas of political community—the inclusion of the “respectable” but not the “roughs”—had no causal relevance for the suffrage changes, but were reflective of transformations that altered political calculations of advantage and strength. These calculations—by party elites and by organized reformers and unionists—in turn drove the politics underlying changes to the suffrage. Accordingly, the cause of institutional change in the electoral qualifications can be attributed to the underlying structural transformations or the more proximate political calculations and contests, but the changing ideas of political belonging are ultimately tangential.

I suggest a different framework. Instead of treating ideas of belonging as generative of institutional change, I treat these as the parameters within which political processes occur. These ideas are the structuring context for political contestation over the right to vote: they incentivize certain projects against others, certain coalitions against others. At the same time, they are themselves political constructs, and can be reconfigured, radically transformed, and even discarded altogether. Insofar as these ideas have broad resonance, they impose strategic dilemmas for political entrepreneurs seeking to alter the franchise qualifications, be it for narrowly instrumental or broadly ideological reasons. These dilemmas are resolved at the level of ideas: in advancing reconfigured narratives of the boundaries and bases for political community whose specific content needs to be taken into account in order to understand subsequent political trajectories.

I proceed as follows. I begin in Section II by outlining the epiphenomenal claim, which remains central to most work in comparative politics on the trajectories of suffrage change over the 19th and 20th centuries. Section III briefly outlines a model for understanding the role of ideas in structuring politics. The different processes identified in the democratization literature—economic change, the relationship between different classes, partisan maneuvering, mobilization for war—are

of central importance, and should not be neglected in any study of suffrage changes. Each of these, however, functions differently depending on the ideological context in which they occur.

Depending on the boundaries and bases for political membership, these processes will be more or less efficacious, and possibly even have a reversed effect than predicted. I outline some behavioral implications of this framework and apply this to the ‘paradigmatic’ cases of the United Kingdom and France.

I begin the empirical analyses in Section IV by tracing the broad trajectories of suffrage change in each country, highlighting patterns that are largely obscured in standard narratives. Section V re-examines critical periods in the process of democratization, and argues that narratives of popular belonging operated as parameters within which the more well-studied political dynamics took place. In the United Kingdom, the re-evaluation of citizenship that took place with Catholic Emancipation (1829) established new parameters and structured political incentives in counter-intuitive ways. Whereas other researchers have argued that Catholic Relief enabled the subsequent Reform Act, I argue concerns with Irish voters limited the expansion of the franchise for decades. In France, the belief that inclusion into the political community was premised on citizenship alone limited the options available to the right and conservative Republicans in the 1870s. Commitments to universal suffrage and broadly shared understandings as to who constituted the people and the nature of republicanism constrained political operatives from pursuing instrumentally rational policies. The comparison across the two cases demonstrates that while there are multiple processes that can support or erode democratic institutional arrangements, these processes operate within and are structured by a political order in which ideas of belonging and citizenship are of central importance. I conclude in Section VI.

Section II: Ideas of Political Community and Democratization

Changes to the electoral franchise have as their immediate cause political contestation and calculation of advantage, whether between parties or organized constituencies of labor, capital, landholders, or others. This contestation, however, is structured by commonly held ideas among lawmakers and the population about the proper basis for membership in the political community. Accordingly, in order to explain the specific enfranchisements and disfranchisements engendered by changes to the suffrage, we need to understand how the content of these ideas conditioned political behavior. This claim does not deny instrumentalism or threat, two of the dominant frames by which changes to the right to vote are interpreted in political science. It is nonetheless an ideational claim, and thus largely disavowed by the comparative politics literature.

The dismissal of ideas as cause usually targets the claim that the logic of democratic theory drove the expansion of the right to vote. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, for instance, are insistent that “however much the democratic ideas were taken up and used by... excluded strata and classes, the notion that it was their universalist character that pushed forward democratization is an idealist illusion” (1992, 46). This literature likewise dismisses the importance of ideas of political belonging or social hierarchies. Race, for instance, is treated as important only (or especially) insofar as it maps onto the structural determinants of class and coercive agriculture (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, Stephens 1992). Consider for instance the recent work of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson. While they do discuss at several points the potential relevance of what they term “alternative political identities,” they are explicit in noting that whatever relevance these might have, they do not alter their basic story.¹ Mostly, however, they deal with disfranchisements of ethnic or racialized categories by reducing these entirely to class: while “there

¹ This is in part, they claim, because political institutions “limit the type of policies that could occur in democracy.” Using the example of Mauritius, in which the convergence of ethnicity and class is relatively weak, they argue that “if institutions limit democracy, then they limit what the East Indian majority can do to the Creole minority” (2006, 40). This assertion that democratic governments cannot be exclusionary or repressive, except insofar as it is tautological, misses the point entirely.

have also been racial restrictions on voting—for example in the United States before the Civil War and in South Africa before the collapse of the apartheid system—... the racial groups disenfranchised have always been poor” (2006, 119). There is consequently no need to engage with the content of ideas as to the proper basis for political community, including broadly held ideas as to the categories of persons fit for republican self-government, categories that have at times excluded (among others) African Americans, women, the Irish, and the “vile multitude” of the working class.

In brief, these accounts posit a null hypothesis that ideas of political belonging and the qualifications for the franchise are causally irrelevant and that any correlation between the two is the result of underlying factors that determines both the electoral qualifications and the ideas of belonging. Patterns at the level of ideas and discourse might reflect something about these factors or political processes, but they do not independently structure or constrain these processes.

Figure 1 Here

Figure 1 provides a rough schematic outline of the hypothesized null relationship between ideas of belonging and qualifications for the right to vote. Exclusions are presumed to reflect some factors that operate by making political agents less likely to support the extension of the right to vote. At the same time, these factors make certain ideas of belonging more likely to resonate with these agents. If some change or process increases the probability of supporting an extension, any change in what these operatives present as their beliefs regarding the proper basis of political membership will be epiphenomenal. Once a suffrage change appears likely, the anticipated change to the electorate leads political elites to embrace ideas of political belonging that align with this, leading to the greater production of such discourse. As noted by Keith McClelland, a historian who does emphasize the importance of changing understandings of political community, “a

consequence of the [Reform Acts in the U.K.] was to legitimate the working-class citizen in new ways” (2000, 71).

In this way, then, the epiphenomenal claim brings into alignment work that argues ideas of what constitutes the basis for membership in a community are formulated and advanced as part of political projects (Smith 2003, Marx 1998) with work that posit parsimonious and influential model of instrumental behavior by political operatives. The specific boundaries and content to peoplehood are not immutable, but reflect calculations of political interest and efforts to reconfigure, redeploy, or re-interpret these ideas to serve the needs of political projects. If political processes have an independent effect on both the ideas of political belonging and the likelihood that political operatives support suffrage change, then why should ideas be given a priority in the causal sequence? If interests and ideas are mutually implicated, then we have a problem of identifying the independent effect of each.

Recent works have interpreted changes to the franchise in the context of broad redefinitions of political belonging. So Catherine Hall, for instance, argues that the “reconstitution of the [British] nation in [the Reform Act of] 1867 was in part focused on the reconfiguration of forms of belonging that were internal to that nation—which men might now vote—but it was also focused on the constitution of the nation’s ‘others,’” notably the blacks, indigenous peoples, Irish, and the white settlers in the Empire (Hall 2000, 179). This broad process of reconfiguring and ‘redefining the Victorian nation’ was the matrix within which the political support for an altered franchise was generated. These works tend to de-emphasize the causal importance of redefined ideas of political community on the politics of the suffrage. Catherine Hall is explicit that her “intention is not to make an argument about the determination of the terms of the Reform Act itself” (Hall 2000, 179). And while Jane Rendall suggests that the 1867 Reform Act initiated a debate over citizenship that “defined the boundaries of the imagined British nation,” she refrains

from claiming the arguments in this debate resulted in the (qualified) victory of the reformers (Rendall 2000, 120).

And yet the clear implication of their work is that these debates *did* matter, not only for subsequent understandings of nationhood and citizenship but in shaping the strategies of political operatives at the time. These strategies in turn are crucial for understanding the successes and failures of reformers and reactionaries and the terms of the enfranchisements and disfranchisements that the suffrage changes enacted. Rather than treating the debates over the suffrage as the site or occasion for a redefinition of the people, I am interested in how the ideas of political membership shaped these institutional outcomes.

There is some basis for this approach in the democratization literature. Acemoglu and Robinson explain their neglect of women's suffrage by reference to the contemporary ideological commitment to patriarchy: "In almost all European countries, voting rights were first given to adult men and subsequently extended to women. *This reflected the then-accepted gender roles*" (2006, 18). The achievement of women's suffrage is phrased in passive terms, the product of women becoming laborers and the consequent breakdown in established gender norms: "when the roles began to change, as women entered the workforce, women also obtained voting rights" (2006, 18). The account of change is structural: women become laborers, laborers are engaged in class conflict with employers organized in the state, and the state extends voting rights to women as laborers.² But the account of the lag is in part ideological: that these were "the *then-accepted* gender roles."

We see the same un-theorized invocation of ideas of political belonging in Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff's updating of the 'frontier thesis' (2005). Arguing that the factor endowments of land and labor determine the extent of the suffrage institutions in the New World,

² This is a problematic claim from an empirical perspective. While it is true that women were entering into the workforce in greater proportions during the period in which most industrial democracies implemented women's suffrage, the minority of countries that deviated from the pattern of immediate equality with men's suffrage all gave the vote to those women who would be least likely to be laborers: women above the age of 30, married or with property.

they note that this was constrained to white men. While white males may have come to believe that "differentiation on the basis of wealth was unfair, unreasonable, or inconsistent with basic rights... [they] remained comfortable supporting the exclusion of groups that were, *in their view, obviously distinctive and unsuitable for participating in community decisions*: blacks, women, children, Native Americans, the mentally incompetent, those with criminal records, and those (immigrants as well as native born) who had not long been resident in the county or state" (2005, 903 emphasis added). By treating this only in a brief caveat, Engerman and Sokoloff leave unexplained why ideological commitments to white male supremacy were sufficient to impede democratization whereas beliefs in the appropriateness of wealth differentiation were not.

I argue that instead of treating ideas of membership as *propelling* democratization, we should see these as *structuring* the political processes that determine institutional changes. In short, the ideas of belonging provide prescriptions for behavior that vary across the relevant categories of persons these ideas delineated. Insofar as these ideas become constitutive to institutions and to understandings of interest, they structure political processes while nonetheless being susceptible to transformation. The next section outlines a framework for understanding and assessing the impact of ideas of political community on the politics of the suffrage.

Section III: Ideas as the Parameters for Politics

The null hypothesis is that ideas, instrumentally deployed or sincerely held, are ultimately secondary to the "real" political processes or factors generating democratization. By contrast, Figure 2 presents ideas as the context in which these processes occur and treats ideas of the proper basis for political community as the parameters structuring the politics over the right to vote.

Figure 2 Here

What does it mean to say that “politics is structured” by these ideas? It means that depending on the ideas of political belonging—notably the boundaries of the community and the proper basis for inclusion to full membership within it—the processes associated with democratization will operate with different effects. This builds on a growing recognition in political science that the assumption of unit homogeneity does not always hold, and that failure to account for the ways in which a causal process unfolds in different contexts might lead to faulty inferences (Falleti and Lynch 2009; Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010). Correlational analyses of the determinants of franchise changes have assumed changes in the independent variable have an effect of equal magnitude across cases. In reality democratizing processes can have varying effect sizes and even directions across cases. Accordingly, we need to take into account the specific context of a given case, including the different ideas of political belonging and how these demarcate and situate various categories of persons.

Ideas of the proper basis for political belonging need to be incorporated into the analysis of democratization. These ideas structure politics by generating expectations among political operatives that violating the strictures of an ideal of political community will entail negative consequences.

Section III(a): Ideas as Parameters for Democratization

Democratization is structured by political orders of peoplehood insofar as enfranchisement or disfranchisement of a category of persons is (1) seen as violating the strictures of a broadly held understanding of political community, and (2) this violation is expected to carry a cost, even for those who might, from the perspective of simple estimates of electoral gain, be best situated to benefit.

Put simply, broadly held ideas of political community and of the proper basis for membership into this community are in part the product of political coalitions, who seek to

reconcile divergent interests through narratives of belonging and common purpose. These ideas of political belonging will structure political behavior insofar as they are embedded in the expectations of political operatives in the form of costs and benefits to adhering to their behavioral prescriptions. Ideas of peoplehood prescribe forms of behavior, which are only adopted insofar as the failure to adopt them imposes a cost. Political parties, to varying degrees, are often organized to impose such a cost on their members. Representation likewise establishes a relation between a representative and a constituency that makes the former sensitive to the preferences of the latter. The more 'representative' a political system—in the sense of forcing political representatives to be sensitive to the preferences of their constituents—the more likely broadly held ideas will set parameters for political behavior. And control over governing institutions and campaigning can both disseminate and reinforce these understandings at a popular level.

Accordingly, the specific content of the ideas of political community are of central importance in understanding the terms of the franchise—its enfranchisements and disfranchisements. It is the specific content, after all, that is important in signaling violations of these ideas, which in turn reveals a failure to fully commit to the terms of political community upon which the party—and often the broader population—believe the constitution is settled.

The possibility of sanctions for violating the terms of these ideas imposes strategic dilemmas for reformers, and it is these dilemmas that I will highlight in the case studies below. Reformers can either accommodate their policies to the dominant ideas of political community, which often entails abandoning their preferred and their instrumentally rational policies. Or they can seek to reconfigure how these ideas are understood in such a way that will accommodate their policy preferences. For instance, they can insist that the idea of the Protestant Constitution, properly understood, is not incompatible with Catholic Emancipation provided that the Catholics accept the terms of the Glorious Revolution and the Protestant Ascendancy. In France,

conservatives in the 1870s would insist that they did not intend to restrict the right to vote—thereby violating broadly held beliefs that French citizenship was defined by universal suffrage and popular sovereignty—but only re-organizing this so as to preserve order. The dilemma is that in seeking to reconfigure these understandings, they are at the same time accommodating themselves to these. The result is that some policy options are effectively foreclosed.

The next section traces the trajectories of suffrage in the United Kingdom and France. This provides an overview of the development of the right to vote—and the enfranchisements and disfranchisements that constitute these trajectories—and sets the context for the case studies. The case studies in turn will examine directly the dilemmas of reformers and how their ideological accommodations to and reconfiguration of dominant ideas of belonging structured the politics of the right to vote.

Section IV: Suffrage Trajectories in the United Kingdom and France

Section IV(a): Suffrage Trajectories in the UK

Figure 3 plots the estimated enfranchisement rates of voters in the United Kingdom, across the four constituent nations, between 1750 and 1885.

Figure 3 Here

The first thing to note is that while we see the empirical basis for the story of progressive and gradual enfranchisement, there are also disfranchisements and distinct patterns depending on the nation in question.³ England and Wales shared a franchise qualification from a very early date,

³ It should also be noted that this figure downplays the extent of the disfranchisements. Given the late starting date (1785), we miss earlier disenfranchisements of men through the imposition of the 40 shilling freehold requirement as well as the de facto removal of the limited enfranchisement of women, an enfranchisement to which early suffragists would draw attention. Women continued to vote and hold office in English vestries, which had been upheld in *Olive v. Ingram* (1738) on the grounds that it was “an office that did not concern the public, or the care and inspection of the morals of the parishoners, [and consequently] there was no reason to exclude women who paid rates” (*Olive v. Ingram* (1738) 7 Mod. 263, 2 Str. 1114) Cited in Vernon (1993, 17). The right of women to vote in vestry elections was confirmed by the Sturges Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819, and then again in the Vestries Act of 1831. Vernon calls

reflected in their closely approximated rates of enfranchisement and registration. Scotland was especially hindered early on, and would not reach parity with England and Wales until 1885. Scotland had a 40 shilling freehold requirement, the same as in England, Wales, and Ireland; but Scotland's requirement was unique in that the 40 shillings was 'old money,' meaning controlling for inflation since the 15th century. The effect was highly disfranchising, and by on the eve of 1832's Reform Act, approximately 1,500 people were entitled to vote in Scotland.

The Irish figures are first for the Irish Parliament, and after the 1800 Act of Union are for the U.K. Parliament. The Irish Catholics were disfranchised by the 1703 Act of the British Parliament requiring Catholics to take the oath of abjuration. This was not always demanded, and not always respected, and there is evidence of Irish Catholics voting and being canvassed for votes during the early 18th century. In 1728 a statute was passed by the Irish Parliament making it an offence for a non-abjuring Catholic to vote, effectively disfranchising even those willing to perjure themselves or who were enabled to vote by the complicity of the returning officer (Hayton 2005, 50).

our attention to the disfranchising dimension of these acts, given the central importance of the vestry prior to the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act: "The Sturges Bourne Vestry Act of 1818 endeavoured, if not to provide a tighter and more exclusive official definition of property, then, at least, to privilege certain definitions of property over others, by introducing a scale of voting whereby ratepayers would have between one and six votes depending on the size of their property.... Moreover, those who did not pay rates were excluded not only from voting, but even from attending vestry meetings, while joint-stock companies and non-resident ratepayers were enfranchised for the first time" (Vernon 1993, 18). Even *The Times* opposed this element of the bill, calling it too "sudden an alteration of the constitution of this realm.... The laws of this realm, the laws of nature and the laws of God acknowledge no such classification or gradations in man" (Vernon 1993, 18). Likewise, the increase in the electorate with the 1832 Reform Act conceals the degree to which it was a re-composition of the electorate, with boroughs denied the capacity to create freemen except 'in respect of birth and servitude' (thereby gradually reducing the inclusion of the laboring classes, mechanics and artisans) and disenfranchised the 'non-resident' freemen: "By far the most striking effect of the Reform Act... was the total disfranchisement of all non-resident freemen. As a number of Tories had correctly predicted, in boroughs where the outvoters dominated the freeman rolls, this led to a remarkable decrease in the size of the electorate, which was totally at odds with the Reform Bill's principle of extending the franchise. In Maldon, where most of the freemen were non-resident, for example, the number of voters dropped from an estimated 4,000 in 1831 to a mere 716 at the first registration in 1832.... Indeed, out of the 105 English boroughs that retained some form of freeman franchise after 1832, almost a third witnessed a reduction in the total size of their electorate as a result of the disfranchisement of non-resident freemen" (Salmon 2005, 111).

In 1778 the first Catholic Relief act was passed, which required an oath renouncing the Stuart claim to the throne and support for the Protestant Ascendancy. It allowed Catholics to own property, inherit land, and serve in the army. The latter would be crucial in 1793, when the need to rapidly build up the army and reserve militias encouraged the King to extend the right to vote to Irish Catholics.⁴ Catholics were still barred from holding office, and the dominance of the Protestant landlords meant that they posed little threat as an electoral bloc. The Act of Union further concentrated the power of the landlords, as it disfranchised many of the boroughs where freemen had been crucial constituencies.⁵ The organization of the Catholic Association would exploit the potential of the Catholic vote, and in 1828 Daniel O’Connell (a Catholic) was elected to represent county Clare in Parliament. The ensuing crisis gave reformers the upper hand in Parliament, and Catholic Emancipation (allowing, among other things, for Catholics to be elected as representatives) was passed in 1829. The cost of emancipation, however, was disenfranchisement. A new electoral law was passed that radically reduced the extent of Irish enfranchisement by excluding the 40 shilling freeholders.

The trajectory of the suffrage in Ireland would not parallel developments in England, Wales, and Scotland. The 1832 Reform Act (Ireland) increased the electorate only slightly. The 1850 Irish Franchise Act was intended to remove some of the more glaring deficiencies of the system, which had become more pressing in the wake of the population collapse and dislocations of the Famine. Overall, the 1850 Act had very little immediate effect, and the subsequent rise in the enfranchisement between 1850 and 1868 had more to do with declining population rates, a decline that was driven by the death and emigration of Irish disproportionately from the disfranchised classes (Figure 5). The Irish would not reach parity in registration and

⁴ This act did not extend to English Catholics, who were disfranchised until 1829.

⁵ Very few Catholics were admitted to the freemanship. The patrons of the individual boroughs claimed a form of property in their representation, “so that by the time of the union in 180-1 borough-owners could apply for, and be granted, pecuniary compensation for disfranchisement” (Hayton 2005, 56).

enfranchisement until passage of the 1885 Reform Act, which gave the entire United Kingdom a common suffrage qualification.

Figure 4 Here

Figure 5 Here

The second thing to note is that a distinct periodization can be discerned by looking at how enfranchisement rates moved across the four nations (Figure 4). Prior to 1885 the terms of the Reform Acts—and the corresponding enfranchisement rates—varied considerably across the four nations. After 1885, the entire United Kingdom shared a single set of suffrage qualifications, ensuring that the enfranchisement rates subsequent were closely paralleled.

Section IV(b): Suffrage Trajectories in France

The Revolutionary constitutions varied in their radicalism and in the actual implementation, but they usually established election by degree.⁶ In 1792, 15% of the population was enfranchised, and the aborted constitution of 1793 would have considerably expanded this number. The Restoration electorate was likewise greatly circumscribed, and became more so as the state ceased assessing for the purposes of restricting the electorate. The July Monarchy did expand the franchise considerably, although they still not approach even pre-1832 British levels. A proposal in the early 1840s to double the electorate was defeated.

Figure 6 here

The February revolution in 1848 established a suffrage “direct and universal without any property condition,” while the subsequent constitution declared that “electors are, without regards to property, all French of the age of 21, not deprived of their civil and political rights.” It was a remarkably large extension, going from 246,000 to over 9,000,000—a 3558% increase (Figure 7).

⁶ In election by two degrees, there would be an electorate that would choose delegates to a college, which would then choose the deputies to the legislative assembly. The proposals ranged from direct suffrage—with no intermediary body—to election by 3 or 4 degrees.

French historiography continues to treat this as the inauguration of universal suffrage, to the point that all subsequent expansions of the franchise are called “extensions of universal suffrage.”

The conservative republicans under Adolphe Thiers, fearful after the election of two radical deputies, passed the law of May 31, 1850, drastically restricting the extent of the suffrage—albeit without introducing a property qualification and thereby not in violation of the constitution. Over 30% of the electorate was disenfranchised, rising as high as 80% in the northern industrial city of Lille, and 56% in Paris (between 60% and 70% in the more popular arrondissements) (Huard 1991, 55). The restriction worked by imposing a residence requirement of three years, excluding all who had been convicted of outrages against public authority, the violation of the 1848 association law, or outrages against religion, public morality, or the rights of property or the family. Servants in residence, adult sons living at home, and workers lodged by the employer were largely excluded, as their domicile required a declaration to that effect by their employer or parent. As Thiers famously put it, the measure targeted the “vile multitude, that which has lost all republics.”

It would be on this this issue that Napoleon III would justify the coup, and the constitution of the Second Empire would re-introduce manhood suffrage, albeit with little actual competition. After this, there is very little change: participation varies, and the degree to which these were competitive elections to legislatures with actual power increased over the course of the Empire. In 1870 the Empire falls in the war with Prussia; the following year the establishment and suppression of the Commune, and by 1877 the consolidation of an ambiguously proclaimed Republic. Despite a landslide monarchist majority in 1871, there is only a relatively small restriction of the suffrage—the removal of the vote from soldiers “under flags.” Instead, despite the opposition of conservatives—monarchists and republicans—to universal suffrage, it is consolidated and made even more central to French understandings of republicanism. Throughout the Third Republic, debates over the suffrage would occur within the parameters established by the association of French

republicanism and universal suffrage. Debates and political contests took place on the issue of reorganizing the suffrage, but not of moving away from the principle.

There are two significant oversights here: women and the colonized both were excluded from the terms of universal suffrage, usually without any second thought. The next section will conclude by discussing these exclusions. But for now what is perhaps most striking is the highly stable character of the franchise despite radical political upheavals.

Section V: Suffrage Politics in the United Kingdom and France

Section V(a): The End of the Protestant Constitution

The dominant understanding of political community in 18th and early 19th century Britain was that of the Protestant Constitution: “Anglo-Saxons were Protestants: England was a Protestant country and the chain of connection between the nation, the monarchy, the constitution and the Protestant church was a very strong one.... English nationhood was formed through such mythic stories as those of the Armada and Guy Fawkes. Anti-Catholicism was a powerful cement, binding the nation together and excluded Irish Catholics in particular in that process” (Hall, McClelland, Rendall 2000, 47).

While this was rooted in the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent settlement, it had been reinforced and reinterpreted at various points in the previous 150 years. Most importantly for shaping 19th century understandings was the emergence of popular anti-radicalism during the war with revolutionary France. The anti-radicals of England and Scotland claimed not the divine right of kings or Filmerian Toryism, but rather a “statement of commitment to the principal features of the old Hanoverian order” (Mori 2000, 81). The principles to which the anti-radicals—a movement that eclipsed in organization and size, if not in popular sympathy, the radicalism associated with Tom Paine—adhered were restatements of the terms of settlement of the Glorious Revolution. An

address by noblemen, gentlemen, freeholders, and justices of the peace in 1792 Roxburghshire declared that “We... seize this Occasion to profess our Satisfaction with the Form of our Government as established at the Glorious Revolution, and since confirmed by subsequent laws.”⁷ Gentry, clergy, and farmers in Hinckford stated that they

“recognize and acknowledge, with sincerest gratitude to divine Providence, the excellent Constitution, consisting of Kings, Lords and Commons, as transmitted to us from our ancestors, but, more especially, in its present improved State, as effected by the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which, we behold, the Sacred Rights of Property, with a Toleration of religious Sentiments, universally extended; and an equal Distribution of Justice; secured, fully, and inviolate, to all Ranks of Men.”⁸

The anti-radicals advanced an aggressive association of English national identity with the terms of the Glorious Revolution, one that would be embraced by the propaganda of the Pitt ministry and widely disseminated across the country. Its key elements were adherence to the Glorious Revolution’s Protestant Constitution, which in practice meant a rejection of parliamentary reform,⁹ the defense of the Test and Corporation Acts (which predated the Revolution and excluded all non-conformists), and opposition to Catholic Emancipation.

While Pitt the Younger had been sympathetic to parliamentary reform—introducing bills to this effect while still a private member—he would come to attack it founded upon “principles which aim at nothing less than a total annihilation of the constitution” (Smith 2005, 81). The upsurge of popular anti-radicalism was such that even Charles Fox was obliged to declare his support for the

⁷ London Gazette, no. 13425, 12-16 June 1792. Cited in Smith (2005, 79).

⁸ London Gazette, no. 13437, 7-10 July 1792. Cited in Smith (2005, 79).

⁹ In the *Englishman’s Political Catechism*—one of the most important anti-radical pamphlets published in the 1790s—the author rejected reform outright:

“Q. But do you not think the manner of representation of the People in Parliament ought to be altered?”

A. No.

Q. Why?”

A. Because I consider it to be the foundation, the step, on which those enemies of the community want to mount, who, instead of the present form of government, wish to have us under the dominion of the mob” (Smith 2005, 86)

constitution and the principles of 1688, and to announce that “I have always deprecated universal suffrage” (Smith 2005, 82).

This period was formative for the ‘new Tory’ party that was being organized around Pitt at the turn of the century.¹⁰ With his death in 1806, the emerging party operatives apotheosized Pitt as “an enemy to parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation,” and veneration for “the sacred and immortal fabric of Pitt” had become a core feature of Tory ideology (Mori 2003, 56). This was certainly not a toryism that would have been recognizable to the Tories of the 17th or early 18th centuries. Rather, “it encapsulated a vision of progress, civilization and national identity that cast Britons as the saviours of polite and commercial humanity” (Mori 2003, 57). Nonetheless, it maintained opposition to reform and emancipation as constitutive to its vision of the boundaries and bases for inclusion within the English political community.

Richard Hart Davis, the Tory member in the House of Commons from Bristol, argued against emancipation on the grounds that the “the British Constitution was essentially Protestant, and that it was therefore necessary to have a Protestant king.... When Roman Catholics were allowed to sit in parliament, and in the privy council, what security could the king have that he would be upheld in any measures which he might deem vitally necessary for the security of the Protestant church and state?”¹¹ The 1807 general election was fought largely over Catholic Relief, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Spencer Perceval organized a campaign around the cry of “Support the King and the Protestant Constitution!” and “No Popery!” Hexter (1936, 301)

This ideological context considerably shaped the strategies of reformers. The proponents of emancipation worked to accommodate their policies to dominant understandings of the

¹⁰ The embrace of the term Tory was never sanctioned by Pitt, and is only anachronistically applied to the emerging conservative Whig coalition of the period from 1790-1810. As Jennifer Mori has noted, “no major Tory presence can be found in British politics between the 1760s and later 1810s. No loyalist of the 1790s, whether in or out of parliament, called him or herself a Tory” (2003, 39).

¹¹ Richard Hart Davis, House of Commons, Hansard, Deb 10 May 1825 vol 13 cc524-25

Protestant Constitution and English understandings of national identity. They pursued various strategies to this effect. Some, such as Lord King, argued that English understandings of the Constitution and the bases for political membership had changed. Speaking of a petition presented against Catholic Relief, King note that

“The petitioners, in the fulness of their generosity, were willing to allow the Roman Catholics to worship God in their own way; but this, it seemed, was the utmost extent of their toleration to one-third of his majesty's subjects, whom they wished to exclude from the privileges of freemen.... Though the endeavours made to get up petitions of this kind were great, the opinion of the country on the question could not be disguised. The hope to raise again the cry of "No Popery," which had so much influence some years ago, was vain. That horrid cry was now dead, he trusted, for ever.”¹²

This argument faced the difficulty that anti-Catholicism continued to have very broad and powerful resonance in England throughout the 19th century. More important discursive strategies were arguments (1) that the Catholics had changed and the influence of the clergy lessened, so the spirit of the Constitution was not violated by Emancipation; (2) that the Catholics—the clergy included—had fully accommodated themselves to the Protestant Ascendancy and the Glorious Revolution, so that again the strictures of the Constitution were not violated.

Lord Calthorpe, for instance, argued that Catholics had changed—and met with an immediate flood of angry letters. He would clarify his position, but in doing so revealed the dilemmas that English understandings of nationhood imposed on reformers:

“Since he last addressed the House on this subject, he had received letters from various parts of the country, expressing surprise that he had given it as his opinion that the Catholic religion was changed. He wished to clear up this misunderstanding. He had distinctly stated, that he thought the Catholic religion, as to its form of faith, still remained unchanged; but that, as regarded the laity, the influence of the clergy was greatly diminished.”¹³

¹² Lord King, House of Lords, Debate 14 April 1825, Hansard vol 12 cc1336,

¹³ Lord Calthorpe, House of Lords, Debate 14 April 1825, Hansard vol 12 cc1272-73

On the one hand, this left reformers vulnerable to the claim that any increase in the influence of the clergy would require a reversal of enfranchisement.

“A large part of the debate which has taken place hitherto upon this great question has, on one side, proceeded upon the assumption, that there has been a considerable change in the principles and character of the church of Rome; a change so considerable as to justify the removal of all those securities, or, at least, of almost all those securities against it, with which the wisdom of a former age had surrounded the Protestant constitution of this country. I contend, on the contrary, that, the church of Rome is not merely unchanged, but unchangeable.”¹⁴

At the same time, it did not contest the core idea of English political community, the Protestant Constitution, and so sought to justify emancipation as a matter of convenience rather than principle. As Lord Eldon would argue in 1821, “the times, it is said, are changed and the Catholics, it is said, are changed; be it so; but such change does not affect the soundness of the principles, upon which this kingdom has established itself as a ‘Protestant kingdom’ with the powers of the state in Protestant hands, and with a Protestant church establishment, and toleration,—toleration from time to time enlarged to the utmost extent the public welfare will admit; but toleration only, for those who dissent from it” (O’Ferrall 1985, 8).

Another strategy was engaged in by Daniel O’Connell and other Irish leaders, namely to “play on Ireland’s national grievances to sustain popular support, but... [to] frame[] their solution—emancipation and repeal—within the historical carapace of the Glorious Revolution” (Loughlin 2007, 18). O’Connell’s political activities and rhetorical protests “were supported by a historical narrative extolling Irish Catholic loyalty to William III and his Protestant successors and a corresponding rejection of James II and the Jacobite tradition—a rewriting of Irish history at the expense of a now redundant monarchical cause” (Loughlin 2007, 18). The purpose was two-fold: he did not violate the strictures of the Protestant Constitution, but he sought to re-define these as no longer requiring ‘toleration only’ but active allegiance. Having built a broad base of support

¹⁴ Sir R. H. Inglis, House of Commons, Hansard, Deb 10 May 1825 vol 13 cc489

among Irish Catholics, O'Connell needed to secure allies among English Whigs, and to a certain degree cultivate goodwill with the Crown. His strategy was to articulate a different understanding of British political community, one that rejected religious bigotry and Union but that allowed for and even insisted on loyalty.¹⁵

Ultimately it was the force of events that drove emancipation: the electoral insurrection of the Catholic Association, the election of O'Connell and the ensuing crisis, and the recognition by Wellington and Peel that “peace would never come to Ireland, and hence to the entire United Kingdom, unless Catholics were granted full political rights” (Ertman 2010, 1006). The impact of emancipation on the immediate political landscape cannot be overstated. It is probable that Emancipation “placed parliamentary reform back on the political agenda in 1830 after the hiatus of 1824 to 1829” (Ertman 2010, 1006). But in passing emancipation, the Tories had violated the strictures of the Protestant Constitution. Perhaps more important than any reformist zeitgeist, which was clear in the successive passage of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, Catholic Emancipation, and in the Reform Act, was the split in the Tories. While the party would re-unify, it would remain a minority party for decades, with the Tories or the Conservatives holding office for only 24 of the remaining years in the 19th century. This created an opportunity for political

¹⁵ In part, O'Connell needed to secure the support of those who, like Tory leader Robert Peel, claimed they would have supported emancipation if they believed that this would “act as an operative” in the restoration of peace and harmony in Ireland. As noted by Fergus O'Ferrall, Peel declared that if he thought emancipation would have achieved that end, “all his fears of danger to the church would give way.” The problem was that “he did not think ‘that the repeal of the laws affecting Roman Catholics’ would harmonise the Catholics and Protestants of Ireland because their divisions sprang from a ‘struggle for mastery’ stretching over centuries and involving perpetual transfers of power and repeated confiscations rather than from the penal laws” (O'Ferrall 1985,6). See Peel's speech in the House of Commons, Feb 28, 1821, in *The Parliamentary Debates*, T.C. Hansard, Vol. 4., (1821) p.1002. O'Connell, in short, needed to convince a sufficient number of English elites that this was not the case and that Irish Catholics had accepted the broad terms of the Glorious Revolution and only sought constitutional reforms that would more closely associate the nation with the British monarch, even if it did not more consolidate the Union. It is perhaps worth noting the similarities between Peel's speech and later discourses in the United States on the disenfranchisement of African Americans. Peel argued that “the struggle between Protestant and Catholic would be violent, and the issue doubtful... if they were to be sent forth together as rival candidates, with an equal capacity for direct parliamentary representation” and that “so far from seeing any prospect of the alleviation of points of mutual difference, he could only anticipate the revival of animosities now happily extinct, and the continuance, in an aggravated form, of angry dissensions now happily gliding into decay and disuse” (1821, 1003).

entrepreneurs—especially those associated with the emerging Liberal party—to advance a new vision of political community.

It would be within the parameters established by new understandings of the British political community—understandings that placed a greater emphasis on empire, race, and progressive civilization—that the politics of the suffrage would play out over the course of the 19th century. The party system that emerged after 1832 would be increasingly organized around religion: the Anglican church would be the “Tory party at prayer,” while Liberals would draw their ranks primarily from Catholics and Dissenters. This organization is especially important in understanding why the Conservatives were willing to accept, and even initiate—legislation that would enfranchise segments of the working class.

How did this change the politics of the right to vote? On the one hand, the Irish were not enfranchised and eligible, making them an increasingly important political bloc in Parliament. This would be essential in the last twenty years of the 19th century. On the other hand, franchise expansion proceeded at a distinct pace for Ireland, the massive disenfranchisement that came with emancipation being overcome only by the 1860s. Perhaps more importantly, the end of the Protestant Constitution as the organizing theme of British identity, and the shift toward Liberal progressivism and imperialism, meant Catholicism would be less of a focus going forward than the putative racial, national, and class character of the Irish. This is not to say that anti-Catholicism died down; it did not, and at various points likely was stronger than it had been at any time since 1807. But the denigration of the Irish would increasingly be race and class based, in which their Catholicism was implicated but not central.

This change also impacted the politics of the right to vote for the non-Irish working class. Consider for instance the abandonment of manhood suffrage as an organizing goal of much of the reform movement. The Chartists had insisted on manhood suffrage without any property

qualification, and had even paused to consider the enfranchisement of women. By the 1860s, Chartism had been eclipsed and the trade unions were organizing the Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association. However, the scope of manhood suffrage had considerably changed. While some—such as Ernest Jones—continued to argue that manhood alone should be the basis for full political rights, the majority of working-class reformers had come to the position that the “residuum” should be excluded (McClelland 2000, 98). They embraced the contrast outlined by John Bright of a “regularly employed, rate-paying working man (possessed of a house, a wife, children, furniture, and the habit of obeying the law) was the heir of the Anglo-Saxon freeman,” whom reformers were insisting had enjoyed the right of suffrage, against a “naturally incapable” residuum. This residuum was increasingly racialized as the ‘Paddy,’ but it was vague enough that it was not anchored to a particular nationality or race. Contrast, for instance, the shadowy man—the ‘rough’ that should not be included in the electorate— in Figure 8 with the depiction of the Fenian in Figure 9.¹⁶

Figure 8 Here

Figure 9 Here

Working class reformers such as Jones who maintained a manhood suffrage standard were increasingly in the minority. The Irish in England were disproportionately impacted by the new year long residence requirement attached to the 1867 Reform Bill, although a considerable number were nonetheless enfranchised. The implication of the racialized Irish into the English working class would ultimately limit the likelihood of achieving manhood suffrage, with this largely accomplished only after resolution of the Irish question and the profoundly altered conditions post-WWI.

¹⁶ “Cartoonists translated such images visually, developing a set of racial characteristics, focusing on a bulge in the lower part of the face, a prominent chin, big mouth, receding forehead, short nose, and upturned nostrils, all of which became the racialised signs ‘Paddy’” (Hall 2000, 213).

Section V(b): Le Suffrage Universel and Republican Sovereignty

In the French case, commitments to universal suffrage in the early 1870s imposed a dilemma to conservatives and monarchists, one that would ultimately undermine their popularity and cost them the government at a crucial period. The recognition that an understanding of French republicanism—founded on a gendered citizenship in which sovereignty was vested in the French citizenry with universal suffrage as its expression—drastically limited the options they were willing to pursue. Accordingly, they were unable to implement instrumentally rational policies for preservation of their rule. Subsequently, they too would rhetorically embrace universal suffrage as the central institution of French nationality, and would thereby re-affirm the idea of universal suffrage and popular sovereignty as a structuring parameter for political processes.

Universal suffrage was central to French understandings of popular sovereignty and republicanism since at least 1850. Against the efforts of Thiers and other conservative republicans, the left and radical republicans organized a massive petition campaign. Over 527,000 signatures were collected—a number more than double the pre-1848 and over 6% of the post-1848 electorate. Examining these provides an excellent insight into the organizing strategies of the republicans as well as the political discourse of popular constituencies. While there were a number of formulaic and pre-printed petitions, there are likewise a large number of petition written in the words of local activists. They overwhelmingly reference the constitution’s article on popular sovereignty: “sovereignty resides in the universality of French citizens.—It is inalienable and imprescriptible.” Across almost all of these is an insistence that the retraction of universal suffrage is “a violation of the constitution, [and] the loss of legitimacy for the Assembly” (Huard 1991, 61). The petitions declared that contractions of the suffrage would violate the principles of the revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848. As noted by Huard,

“A point in common unites [the petitions], the profound attachment to the principle of universal suffrage: ‘the essence of the Republic,’ it is ‘the right’ against which no legality can prevail (‘there is no law against right’), and it is ‘sacred, not to say of divine right’ and we must respect it ‘even in its errors’” (Huard 1991, 62).

While some of the ‘popular légitimistes’ opposed the restriction, with at least one arguing that universal suffrage had its origins in Catholicism and thus pre-dated and had constituted the Monarchy, the bulk of the légitimistes, the conservative republicans, and the Orléanistes supported it.

“We excluded from the ballot a few well-intentioned and sober workers, but on the other hand, we forbade the assemblies to all the vagabonds, the ex-convicts, the citizens without domicile and without confession, the formidable recruits and fanatical henchmen of the social Republic. Could we hesitate before this alternative? We think not” (Huard 1991, 58).

When Napoleon III, elected President in 1848, proposed in 1851 the restoration of universal suffrage, he had the support of 348-355 in the Assembly. Uniting the Bonapartistes with the left republicans, he isolated the forces of order, and laid the foundation for the coup. The imperial period’s frequent use of plebiscites and elections to relatively impotent legislative assemblies has been referred to as a learning period: universal suffrage took roots in the country as the form of elections and the parameters of manhood suffrage came to be expected. There is certainly some truth to this. On the other hand, for the republican opponents of the empire there remained a suspicion, less that it would inaugurate the social Republic as had been feared in 1850 but rather that universal suffrage would lend itself well to tyranny. These misgivings were shared during this period by the anti-imperialist rightists, légitimistes and Orléanistes.

After the collapse of the Empire, with the German Imperial army occupying over 40 French departments, the rightists and the conservative republicans were well-placed to implement policies that reflected their opposition to universal suffrage. The republicans advocated continued war against Germany, while the monarchists and the conservative republicans under Thiers advocated a negotiated peace. In legislative elections held in 1871—while the country was occupied

and hostilities continued—the monarchists won a clear majority. The radical Republicans won 38 seats, the moderate Republican 112, the conservative Republicans 72, and the bonapartistes 20. Only the first and the last of these blocs were unambiguously committed to universal suffrage, although there was considerable support for this among the moderates. By contrast, the Orléanistes won 214 and the légitimistes 182 seats, giving the assembly not only a clear monarchist majority but a majority overwhelmingly opposed to universal suffrage.

Figure 10 Here

Among the most important things on the agenda of the new government was the restriction of universal suffrage. The first few years of the 1870s saw an enormous interest in the terms of the suffrage, with individuals and factions campaigning to institute their preferred system. Figure 10 plots the appearance of the term “suffrage universel” in French publications from 1800 to 1960. There is a clear spike in interest after its inauguration in 1848, but the largest spike comes in the early 1870s when the debate over suffrage institutions was underway. The right and the conservative republicans were scathing in their indictments.

The Count of Semainville, among others, published a pamphlet in 1871 in which he attacked it as “an immoral, anti-social, senseless and dissolving institution, unknown—no doubt for this reason—among the peoples that have inhabited the globe.”¹⁷ The Duc de Broglie, the monarchist Prime Minister from 1873-1874 and again in 1877, said that “universal suffrage does not have the sense of sight; it only has the sense of touch” (Rosanvallon 1992, 317). This antipathy was not solely among political elite. As one contemporary observer noted, “the French middle classes had not forgotten the consideration which they had enjoyed under a reign which was their own handiwork and very image. Recalling the happy times of the property suffrage, they did not

¹⁷ « Or, notre suffrage universel actuel est une institution immorale, anti-sociale, insensée, dissolvante et inconnue, sans doute par ce motif, des peuples qui ont jusqu'ici habité notre globe. » Semainville (1871)

easily accustom themselves to the sovereignty of universal suffrage and the disturbing vote of the horny-handed” (Hanotaux 1903, 37).

Even Republicans such as Gustave Flaubert and Ernest Renan were opposed. Flaubert would write that “the first remedy will be to finish with universal suffrage, the shame of the human spirit” (Huard 1991, 107).¹⁸ Renan denounced the inauguration of universal suffrage in 1848 as “a great error,” and believed that it needed to be controlled through elections by two degrees, with the second degree electors “nominated almost for life” (Huard 1991, 108). In this he was seconded by the *légitimiste* Pretender—the Duc de Chambord—by Adolphe Thiers, and by the entirety of the conservative bloc, republican and monarchist alike. Still, Renan, along with most of the conservatives, would ultimately consider it imprudent to overturn universal suffrage. In fact, all efforts to restrain the suffrage were handicapped by the belief that it had become a central element of French self-understandings.

In 1873, a crucial by-election was fought in part on this issue. The Thierist candidate, Rémusat, was opposed by Barodat, a radical mayor of Lyons who had been removed from his post by the government. The radicals campaigned on a three part programme: (1) the immediate dissolution of the Versailles Assembly, (2) the absolute integrity of universal suffrage, and (3) the convocation of a constituent assembly. It was the second point that “most viscerally gripped radical opinion” and became the central issue on which the election was fought (Wartelle 1980, 613): “The vote to which Parisians are called must have a decisive meaning and influence. Their vote must save the Republic and universal suffrage from the perils that threaten them.”¹⁹

The Thierist candidate would eventually be forced to embrace universal suffrage, recognizing that failure to do so was likely to cost him the election. In doing so, he estranged the

¹⁸ « Le premier remède serait d'en finir avec le suffrage universel, la honte de l'esprit humain. » September 8th, 1871.

¹⁹ « Le scrutin auquel ils (les Parisiens) sont appelés doit avoir une signification et une influence décisives. Leur vote doit sauver la République et le suffrage universel des Périls qui les menacent. » Édouard Portalis : « Une Protestation » in *Le Corsaire* April 6, 1873. Cited in Wartelle (1980, 605)

conservatives and split the coalition between them and the monarchists.²⁰ His defeat would result in the collapse of the Thiers ministry and the accession of the monarchists under de Broglie and Marshall Mac-Mahon.

With the defeat of Rémusat the right and conservative republicans are radicalized, and “universal suffrage is first among the accused” (Rosanvallon 1992, 316): “One would believe there had been a sudden return to the spring of 1850. The only question discussed is how to ‘turn back democracy,’ ‘to push down the mass,’ to ‘avoid social peril’” (Rosanvallon 1992, 316). The essential task, conservatives argued, was to restrict universal suffrage. As one contributor put it in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, “if we want to build a genuinely, essentially conservative project, we must first draft an electoral law” (Rosanvallon 1992, 316). A commission headed by Anselme de Batbie—a monarchist legislator—was elected by the Assembly on December 4th, 1873. It was dominated by légitimistes, and Batbie explicitly outlined the project of the commission as being to “react against the law of numbers” (Rosanvallon 1992, 316).

A number of proposals were floated in this commission, the more draconian receiving hearty endorsement by the conservatives and monarchists. Raising the minimum age to 25 had near unanimity among the conservatives, and yet they believed that it would be inexpedient. It would be seen as going too far in breaking with past tradition—the suffrage had always been fixed at 21—without achieving much in the way of the intended reduction (Huard 1991, 110).²¹ An extension of the residence period was also considered, but worries that this would be associated with the 1850 disenfranchisement were especially pronounced. Thiers believed it was “sovereignly

²⁰ “M. Barodet [the radical] can count on the votes of three-fourths of the [Republican] party. An alliance between the moderate Republicans and the Conservatives might have returned [Thierist candidate] Count de Rémusat, but he has estranged many of these latter by his address, in which he promises to maintain the Republic and to preserve universal suffrage intact.” *The Economist* was very concerned with the election of Barodet, believing it would signal the triumph of “the Reds.” *The Economist*, “Foreign Correspondence,” Saturday April 19, 1873.

²¹ After all, the law of July 27, 1872, had already removed the suffrage from soldiers under arms, and conscription had ensured that a considerable number of 21-25 year olds were currently in the army.

imprudent,” while De Castellane, a rightist who was favorable in principle, believed the time “had not yet come for such measures” (Huard 1991, 110). A variation on this was a recommendation that distinguished between those born in a commune and those born outside: for the former 6 months residence would suffice, while for the latter three years would be required. This had the great advantage of maintaining the franchise for small farmers while greatly disfranchising the urban proletariat (Huard 1991, 110). Its defect in the eyes of conservatives was the ‘absurdity’ of enfranchising the returned vagabond at the expense of the newly installed merchant.

Other deputies discussed the return to a property qualification, while the idea of some form of education requirement—or plural voting for those with diplomas—had considerable support. Some cautioned against both of these, such as rightist Eugène Tallon who argued that restrictions based on property or education were misguided: “capacity is difficult to establish. If it resides in good sense and reason, we see illiterate men who have more than baccalaureates. It would be dangerous to base it on diplomas; all the ambitious and the degenerate generally have these.”²² Although some insisted on caution, the commission was becoming increasingly the site for conservative fantasies about constructing their ideal electorate. Even the rightist *La Revue de Deux Mondes* denounced the commission as “obviously the victim of an illusion. It misunderstands: it was not created to deliver itself to the study of these fantasies.”²³

The criticism of *La Revue* was echoed by other rightists and conservatives, who were increasingly worried that allowing the commission to pursue a restriction of the suffrage would result in them violating the highly resonant understandings that linked universal suffrage with

²² « C'est un système faux de le fonder sur les capacités et sur la fortune. La capacité est difficile à établir. Si elle réside dans le bon sens et la raison, on voit des gens illettrés qui en ont plus que des bacheliers. Il serait dangereux de le baser sur des diplômes; tous les ambitieux et les déclassés en sont généralement munis. » Commission relative à l'examen des lois constitutionnelles: Fourth session, December 17 1873. (Archives Nationales, C* II 611-612-613). See also Rosanvallon (1992, 317)

²³ « La commission est évidemment le jouet d'une illusion, elle se méprend, elle n'a pas été créée pour se livrer a ces études de fantaisies. » (Rosanvallon 1992, 322)

citizenship and popular sovereignty. As they understood, the victory of the monarchists did not necessarily imply a popular desire for the return of the King, let alone the absolutism espoused by the Pretender. The election of 1871 was carried out in considerable confusion, and peace was the organizing concern: “the electors, without being opposed to the Republic, wanted peace; this consideration was paramount. It is, however, necessary to observe that no vote was anywhere given against the Republican ideal. Not a candidate protested against the Revolution of the 4th of September” (Hanotaux 1903).

Universal suffrage was far too popular, but its popularity was due largely to the resonance of the idea that it was central to French understandings of national identity, among republicans but also the monarchical base. Sensitivity to this resonance led the conservatives and rightists—inside and outside the commission—to treat the issue gingerly: “One must treat universal suffrage with flexibility so as to avoid provoking a crisis, of which the past is a sure guarantee” (Huard 1991, 109).²⁴ Conservatives recognized that universal suffrage was too resonant, too central to French understandings of political community. They believed that “if it could disappear, it would be only after it had driven us to the depths of the abyss” (Huard 1991, 109). They believed that changing it in its substance would “would raise a formidable resistance in the country. The institution of universal suffrage is a misfortune, no doubt, but it has existed for more than 20 years. It has set down deep roots in the country.”²⁵ The institution had “entered into our mores. The country holds to it. By mutilating it, we would raise passions and bring about cruel disappointments for us.”²⁶ And so while most conservatives were sympathetic to and even desired a return to property qualifications, “none would dare say it aloud” (Rosanvallon 1992, 317): “With their customary

²⁴ « Il faut traiter le suffrage universel avec souplesse sous peine de provoquer une crise dont le passé est un sûr garant.»

²⁵ Commission, Seventh session, December 24 1873.

²⁶ Commission, Fourth session, December 17 1873. See also Rosanvallon (1992, 317)

prudence they refrained from advertising their sentiments; but they cherished them at the bottom of their hearts.” (Hanotaux 1903, 37).

Given the broad commitment to a particular understanding of French identity, one that prioritized popular sovereignty expressed through the suffrage of the universality of its male citizens, conservatives were confronted by a strategic dilemma. Their most frequent response was to insist that they were adhering to universal suffrage, but only attempting to modify and re-organize it so as to not lead to constant revolution. So H. Druon noted that universal suffrage needed to be maintained, and that “if we must respect universal suffrage in principle, it is at least permissible to organize it, to manage it” (Druon 1871, 6).²⁷ Others would note that “the right of suffrage is a function, it is not an absolute right. But we cannot mutilate it, nor suppress it, but only organize it.”²⁸ The concerns with violating the strictures of French self-understandings led conservatives and rightists to believe that they “must then conserve universal suffrage, but we must also correct it, temper it, and give it a counterweight” Rosanvallon (1992, 318). This effort to accommodate their policies to universal suffrage—to organize it to better serve their interests without being seen as violating its terms—reflected the dilemmas imposed on political operatives by the parameters of a broadly resonant understanding of political community.

This broad resonance was not free-floating, but was encouraged by the organizational efforts of the Republicans, who recognized its central place in French citizenship and organized their campaigns and their defense of the Republic around it. They claimed the legacy of universal suffrage as the essential character of French republicanism. In 1873, Édouard Millaud wrote “Le Suffrage Universel,” which was published and distributed by la *Société d’instruction républicaine*. This tract—like others published and disseminated by republican journals and publishers—

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²⁸ Commission, Seventh session, December 24 1873.

appealed to farmers and those sympathetic to the ‘flag of order,’ precisely those constituencies that had returned a monarchial majority in 1871 and which the party recognized as central to its prospects for governance. Universal suffrage was not only crucial to the republican tradition, but was the “only legitimate authority” that could provide order in a time of turmoil: “The republic and universal suffrage are two words for the same proposition.... Hereditary monarchy excludes elections: republicanism demands them. Monarchy alienates the liberty of future generations and fatally condemns us to future revolutions; the Republic assures order through the constant exercise of national sovereignty.”²⁹ Republican committees in accepting candidacies required pledges and promises “of a more and more pressing character with reference to the suffrage” (Hanotaux 1903, 620).

The goal, however, was not just to cast themselves as defenders of resonant French understandings of citizenship. Rather, they sought to reconstruct the positions of their opponents. Even though they were in the minority, the coherent ideological position of the Republicans—especially its radical wings—forced the monarchists and conservatives to respond. The result was the foundation of the Republic by those most opposed to it. As future president and radical Republican Gambetta put it, “we wish to exhibit this spectacle of Republicans by birth who remain in the opposition in the face of Monarchists converted and compelled by the cohesion of the Republican party and the legality of the Republic to accomplish the reforms which it demands” (Hanotaux 1903, 253; see especially Hanson 2010).

The ultimate recommendations of the Batbie commission pleased no one. At the end of the commission, after 6 months of debate over various schemes to reform and restrict the suffrage, the members voted a restriction: 25 years and over, domiciled in the commune for three years—

²⁹ Millaud, Édouard (1873) *Le Suffrage Universel* (Société d’instruction républicaine : Paris), p.30

and 6 months for those born in the commune—with a highly restrictive evidentiary requirement.³⁰ They rejected a property requirement because “the Commission... feared upsetting the most lively and suspicious feeling among us, equality.”³¹ While the radical republicans were incensed (and delighted) by the recommendations, which Gambetta called “an enterprise directed against universal suffrage,” the right and the conservative republicans were disappointed. The conservatives believed the restrictions would be insufficient, while the right believed that it maintained the principle of individualism rather than the accommodation of social interests. The commission’s recommendations were put on hold, with few on the right outside of the commission having any desire to take positions against universal suffrage.

Conservatives found much more engaging the report of the commission on decentralization, which included restrictions on domicile and increased the voting age to 25, allowed for the consultation of the largest taxpayers to the municipal councils, the plural vote for married men, and a cumulative voting system inspired by the one in use in Illinois (Rosanvallon 1992, 327). Again, considerable hesitation about violating the strictures of universal suffrage led first to the reduction in the residence requirement from 3 years to 1, the maintenance of the 21 year old age qualification, and eventually to the abandonment of plural and cumulative voting. The conservatives were able to secure a measure allowing the deliberation of the most highly taxed with the council on a limited range of fiscal issues, as well as a re-centralization of authority in which the mayors and commune adjuncts were nominated by the central government (Schmidt 1990, 52; Rosanvallon 1992, 329). The centralizing thrust of the right during this period was quite explicitly intended to “counterbalance universal suffrage by using mayors as electoral agents,” a response to

³⁰ The eligibility requirements were more onerous still. For instance, eligible had to be registered for five years among the taxpayers of a commune, a measure that was intentionally targeted against republican journalists and publishers who would install themselves in small towns and villages in order to disseminate republican ideology (Rosanvallon 1992, 326).

³¹ *Annales de l'Assemblée Nationale*, v.30, February 21-Mars 28, 1874, annex no.2320, pp.202-217. Rosanvallon (1992, 324)

the growing effectiveness of Gambetta's strategy of forming a republican coalition with the "middle-income peasants" (Schmidt 1990, 51-52). Nonetheless, the republicans believed that they had secured the principle of universal suffrage: "Universal suffrage is saved. It remains the fundamental law of French society. *It is a definitive conquest.*"³²

After this, the right's position on the electoral law completely collapsed. The Batbie commission resigned, and a year later a new electoral law was proposed that maintained the suffrage without age restrictions or onerous residence requirements, maintaining only the 1872 restriction on military voting. As remarked by one republican member of the commission, "the principles of popular sovereignty and of universal suffrage have risen to the state of political dogma in this country" (Rosanvallon 1992, 329)

Ultimately the conservatives did not reduce universal suffrage, despite their desire to do so and recognition that doing so would likely be necessary to stem the republican gains among the small and middle farmers and petit-bourgeois. Adolphe Thiers admitted to having made an error in passing the 1850 disenfranchising law, and recognized that its broad resonance among the population made any violation of its strictures a potential weapon against the republic: "December 2 [Napoleon III's coup] taught me that we had placed a formidable weapon in the hands of an adventurous man. This caused me considerable reflections. There is always a danger of giving arms to those who could present themselves to the country as intending to reestablish universal suffrage" (Rosanvallon 1992, 330). Even the Duc de Chambord would subsequently accept the retention of universal suffrage in his 1874 manifesto, even as he failed in his quest to gain the crown by his refusal to abandon the Bourbon flag. Ultimately, "the victory of universal suffrage did not proceed solely by conquest: it seems in many ways to have been the result of resignation, the collapse of resistance; it was more of a forfeit than a fight" Rosanvallon (1992, 324)

³² *La République Française*, July 3, 1874. Cited in Rosanvallon (1992, 329)

This resignation—and the accommodation of the right to the terms of universal suffrage—would structure the politics around the right to vote for decades. No more would they speak of reducing the suffrage, but rather they would extend it through familial suffrage, a form of plural voting in which either the husband could vote for his wife and children or the father voted for his children and the married woman was enfranchised as well (see La Naour and Valenti 2005). The socialists, in turn, would also defend universal suffrage and call for its extension—to women and, with more vacillation, to the indigenous Algerians—and especially its reorganization through proportional representation. The Senate and the Chambre des Députés of the French National Assembly would maintain a standing Committee on Universal Suffrage throughout the Third Republic, signifying the centrality of universal suffrage and becoming a site for debates over proposals on how to renew, expand, and reorganize this without violating its terms.

Given the centrality of universal suffrage, how were the exclusions of indigenous Algerians and women justified? For the former, their disfranchisement was largely unproblematic precisely because they were not citizens. The extension of the vote was debated—although not as extensively as it was for women—but it proceeded largely within the terms of nationality. The *indigènes* Muslims would be entitled to vote for the National Assembly (they had highly circumscribed and reduced representation for municipal government), but only after they had been naturalized. As recognized by some authors, the indigenous Algerians were denied universal suffrage, but naturalization—with its subordination of Islamic status—was the remedy (Demontès 1906, 584).³³

³³ « Le système le plus avancé serait une refonte générale de la législation électorale en Algérie : ce système hardi irait jusqu'à remettre en question le suffrage universel en Algérie, en alléguant qu'il n'y existe pas. Et, en effet, dit-on qu'est-ce que le suffrage universel? C'est la participation de tous les habitants majeurs et mâles d'un pays à la souveraineté sous forme d'électorat, c'est la suppression de toute distinction entre les sujets et citoyens. Eh bien! en Algérie sur quoi repose l'organisation de la population? Précisément sur la distinction entre ces sujets qui sont plus de 3 millions et des citoyens qui ne sont qu'aux environs de 800,000. Aussi, dit-on, sans porter atteinte aux grands principes qui sont intangibles en France, on pourrait faire sur des bases nouvelles un corps électoral algérien. Voilà le système le plus avancé et le plus hardi - Le système le plus atténué consisterait à exiger de tout électeur, quelle que soit son origine, sa nationalité, son mode d'introduction dans le corps électoral, qu'il sache lire et écrire en français, à écarter d'une façon

This, however, was opposed by many who considered the Arab incompatible with French citizenship: “The naturalization of the Arabs, utopia. You might put only one condition, but, for them to accept it, they would have to no longer be Arabs.... You flatter yourselves in wanting to make them citizens, electors? It would please you to include them in civic affairs, in provincial affairs, in national affairs. This is double or triple utopia.... Naturalization of the indigenes, assimilation, universal suffrage, leave it. Leave in Marseilles the Immortal principles. Do not export the Declaration of the rights of man. Do not politick more over this poor Arab, who is already over-politicked” (Benoist 1892, 179). Even many of those who recognized the incompatibility of republican governance with the ‘subject’ status of indigenous peoples opposed the extension of suffrage to Arabs. The solution, however, was to re-organize the suffrage in Algeria so that it was neither a danger nor a violation. Treat Algeria as a colony, without departmental representation: “Rather than give the suffrage to the Arabs, we should do better.... It would be more wise to suppress colonial representation.... In effect, either we must extend to the indigenes the right to vote, which even for the Kabyles is a hollow dream, or, because we cannot take it away from the colonists and the Jews, we must infinitely modify its usage” (Benoist 1892, 179, 222).

To a lesser extent, the denial of the vote to women was also premised upon their relationship to republican citizenship. The argument that wars have enabled movements demanding egalitarian institutional reform is widespread in the literature, with various authors arguing that mobilization for war was crucial for the achievement of women’s suffrage in the U.S., the U.K., and in Canada. This pattern is generally considered to be reversed for France, such that the war of 1870-71 “is now commonly perceived as a major setback in the feminist history of

absolue du corps électoral tous ceux qui ne sont pas en mesure d’entrer en communication avec leurs co-électeurs français dans la langue même du pays à la souveraineté duquel ils participent. » (Demontès 1906, 584)

France” and the First World War is seen as impeding the women’s suffrage movement (Taithe 2001, 110, 212 fn.35).

While WWI is read as a setback because contemporaries recognized that the slaughter of males would result in women being a clear majority of voters, the setback of 1870 is largely a function of the subsequent narrative of their perceived roles in the Commune and its suppression. While narratives of a “sacred,” heroic, and humanitarian voluntarism among women were present after the war, these were undermined by narratives deployed by revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries as to women’s reactionary or venomous character. The counter-revolutionaries and the forces of order demonized the women of the Commune as prostitutes-, propagating a myth of revolutionary orgies; as revolutionary firebrands, inciting men into violence; and as the *pétroleuses* who set fire to the city as the army moved in. The radical left, for its part, described in disgust the “cruel and degenerate *bourgeoises*” who spit on and threw stones at the Communards on their way to Versailles, and insisted that they were subordinated by the Church and their husbands and thus would always be a threat to republicanism (Taithe 2001, 116).

It would be decades before the radical right and the radical left—the first for a combination of instrumentalism and idealism, the second largely for reasons of idealism—would advocate women’s suffrage. It would be vigorously opposed, however, by republicans who saw in the extension of the vote to women an effort to undermine the foundation of the Republic itself.

Section VI: Conclusion

Defenders of the Protestant Constitution were able to delay Catholic Emancipation for at least 30 years, from the Act of Union when it was promised (by Pitt, in contrast to his subsequent valorization of the opponent of emancipation) until 1829. During this time, its advocates sought to reconfigure English understandings of their constitution and its terms for full membership. The

liberal progressivism, attached to Empire and a civilizational and racial discourse, of the Victorian era would not emerge overnight. It was nonetheless a constitutive element to the Liberal coalition, and would structure the politics of the right to vote throughout the 19th century.

French republicans had successfully disseminated the idea that sovereignty resided with the people, and that its expression was universal suffrage. This was not contested by Napoleon III, but was in fact claimed as constitutive: in his proclamations and constitutions, he always referred to his electoral majority by universal suffrage in 1848. In the 1870s, the radical republicans renewed their commitment to universal suffrage, and sought to both exploit and re-affirm its popular resonance. They did not claim universal suffrage as their own; rather, they insisted that it was constitutive of French citizenship and republicanism, and thus built a broad coalition in its defense. The expectation that violating its strictures would be costly ultimately led the rightists and conservatives to abandon their hopes of restriction, and would eventually lead them to rhetorically embrace universal suffrage as their own.³⁴

Ideas of political belonging and the basis for membership in the political community are themselves political constructs, whose content reflects in part the necessities of building a coalition and the inherited ideational legacies in which this is done. As such, they might seem to be secondary to the political dynamics underlying democratization: they respond to these dynamics, and are changed by them, but they ultimately do not cause democratization. They might be meaningful, interesting, but are not causal.

This is a widespread position in the comparative politics literature on democratization, one that argues on a mistaken effort to sharply delineate institution, interests, and ideas. The persuasive dimension to ideas—the degree to which one is persuaded to adopt a new outlook on the world—

³⁴ See Louis de Bellval's *Le complot contre le suffrage universel* (1888), a rightist tract against the Radical Republican ministry published by a conservative organization calling itself the 'Association pour la defense de la suffrage universel.'

can be distinguished but in practice cannot be fully separated from the calculation of cost to adopting the behavior that a given idea prescribes. This does not mean instrumental, interest based calculations are prior to the political ideas; rather, it means that they are constituted by these ideas, as this calculation proceeds on the basis that there will be costs to violating dominant ideas precisely because of the expectation that these are important to key constituencies.

Accordingly, ideas of political community should be thought less as generative of institutional change, and more as the parameters within which political processes occur: they incentivize certain projects against others, certain coalitions against others. The fact that they are themselves political constructs, however, means that political entrepreneurs have the capacity to reconfigure and transform these, opening up space for policy change. In pursuing this, political operatives must confront the strategic dilemmas imposed by seeking to alter a political order while working within its parameters. These dilemmas were resolved by advancing reconfigured narratives of the boundaries and bases for political community that could plausibly be claimed to not violate the strictures of the dominant understandings while nonetheless transforming these in such a way as to alter subsequent political trajectories.

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Figures

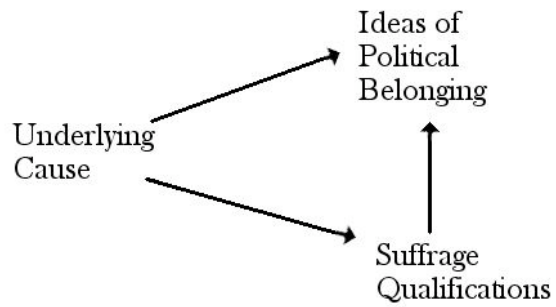


Figure 1: Null Hypothesis: Ideas as Epiphenomenal

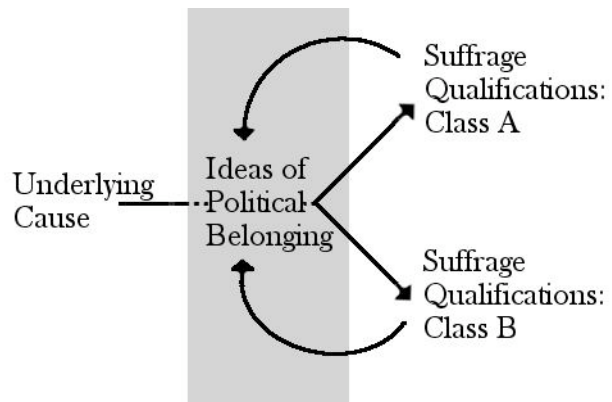


Figure 2: Alternative Hypothesis: Ideas as Parameters

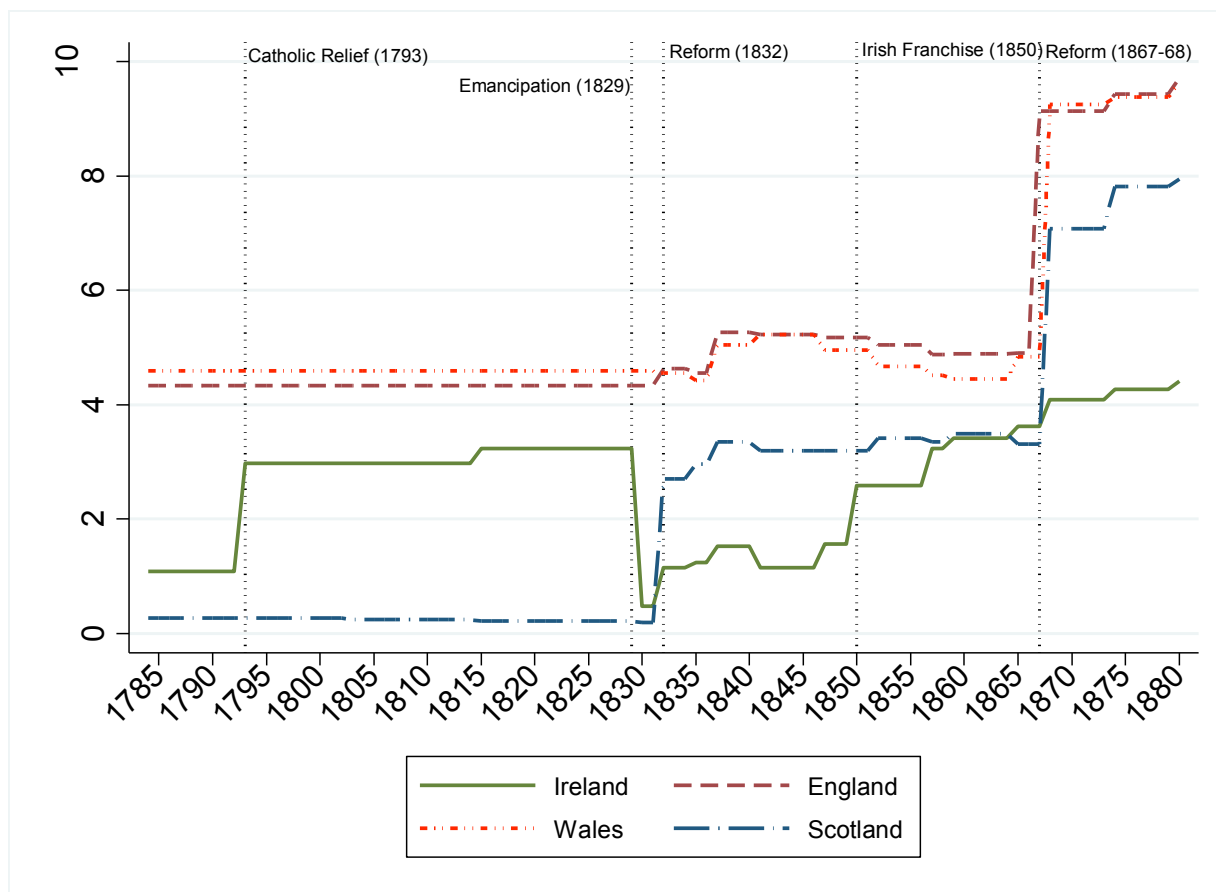


Figure 3: Suffrage Trajectories United Kingdom, 1785-1885

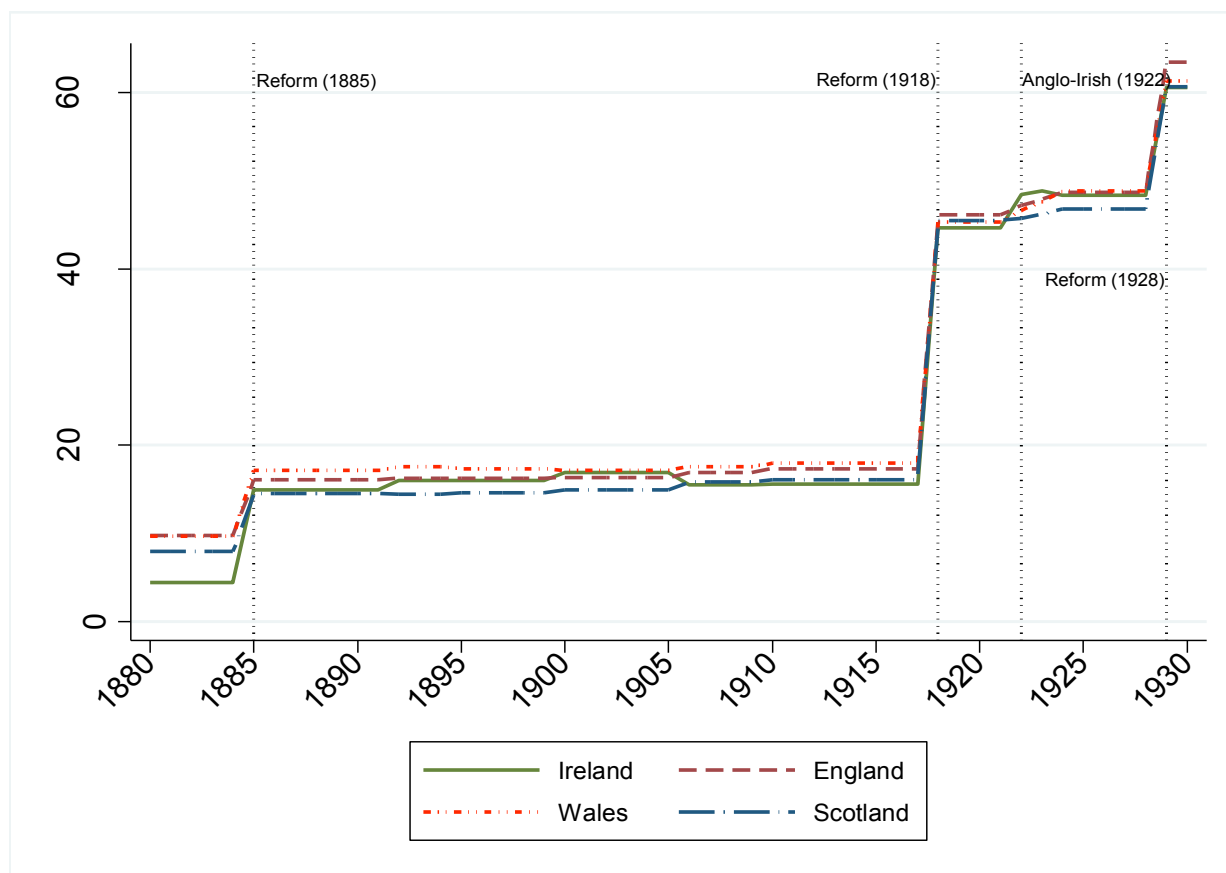


Figure 4: Suffrage Trajectories United Kingdom, 1885-1930

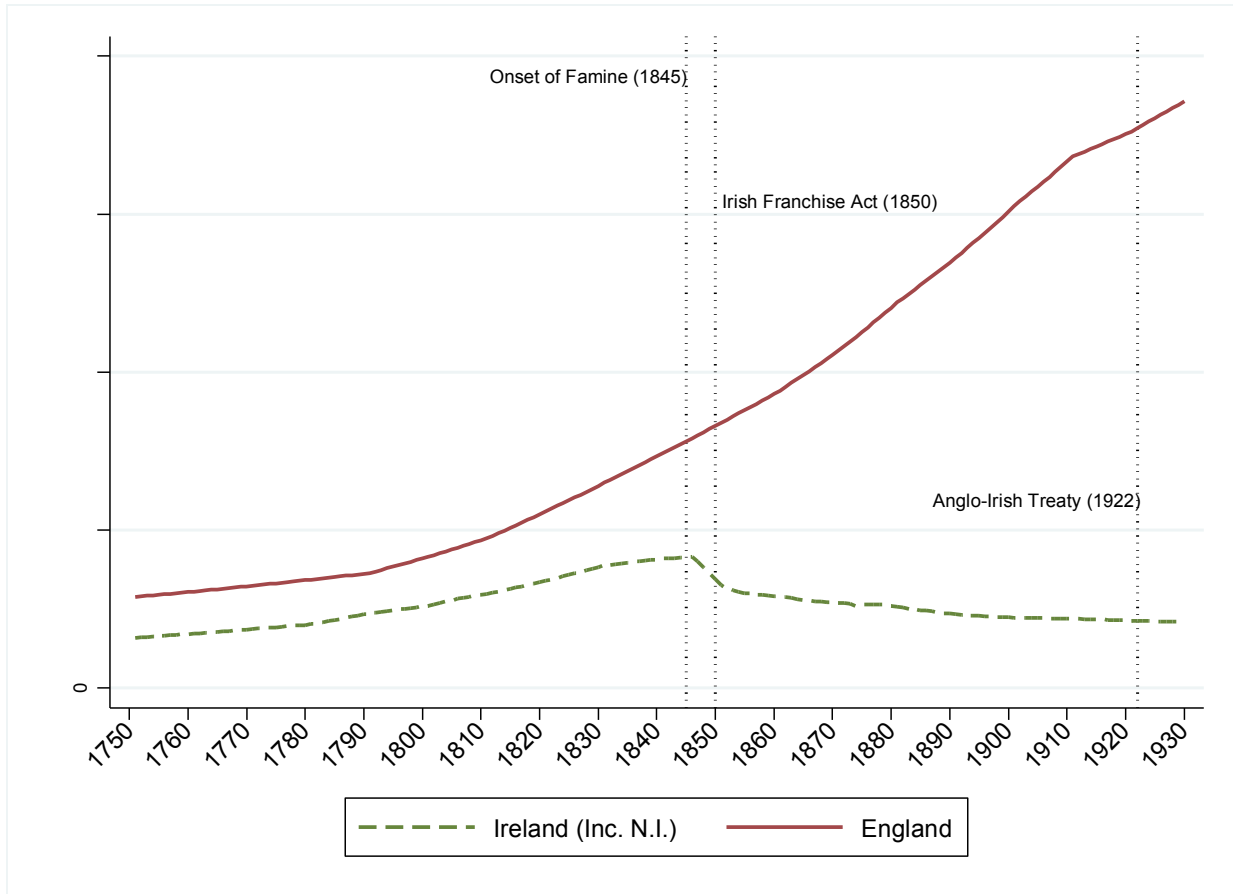


Figure 5: Population, England and Ireland (1750-1930)

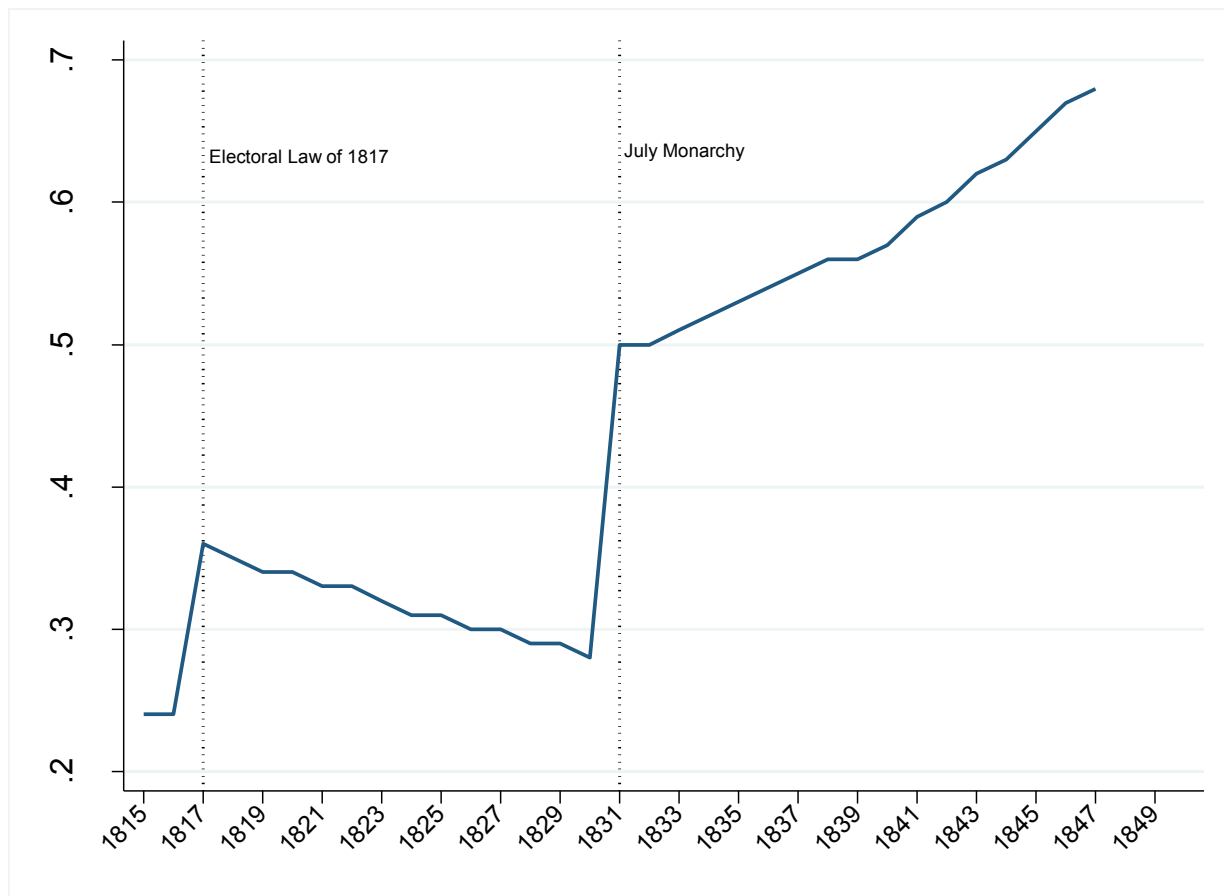


Figure 6: Percent Registered, France 1815-1848

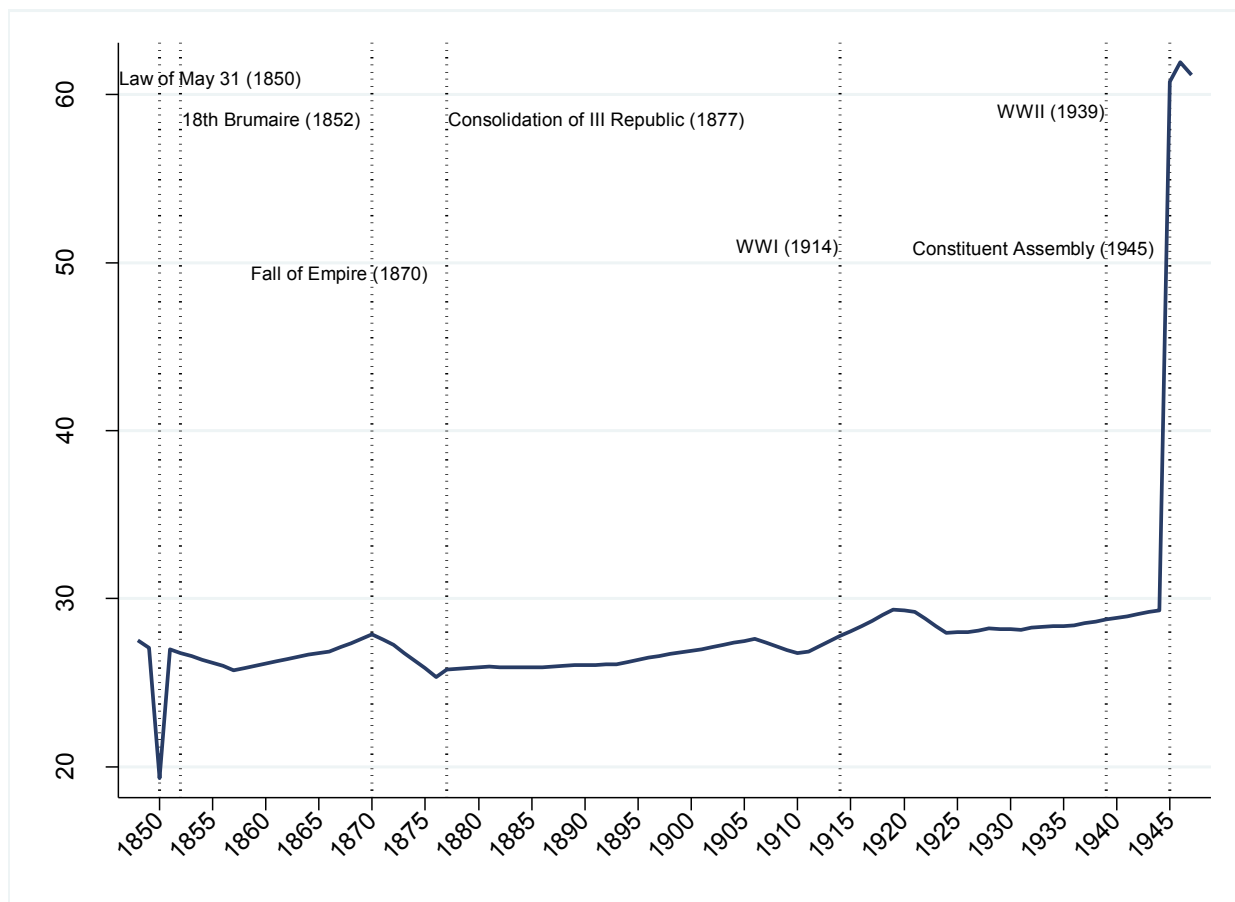


Figure 7: Percent Registered France, 1848-1945

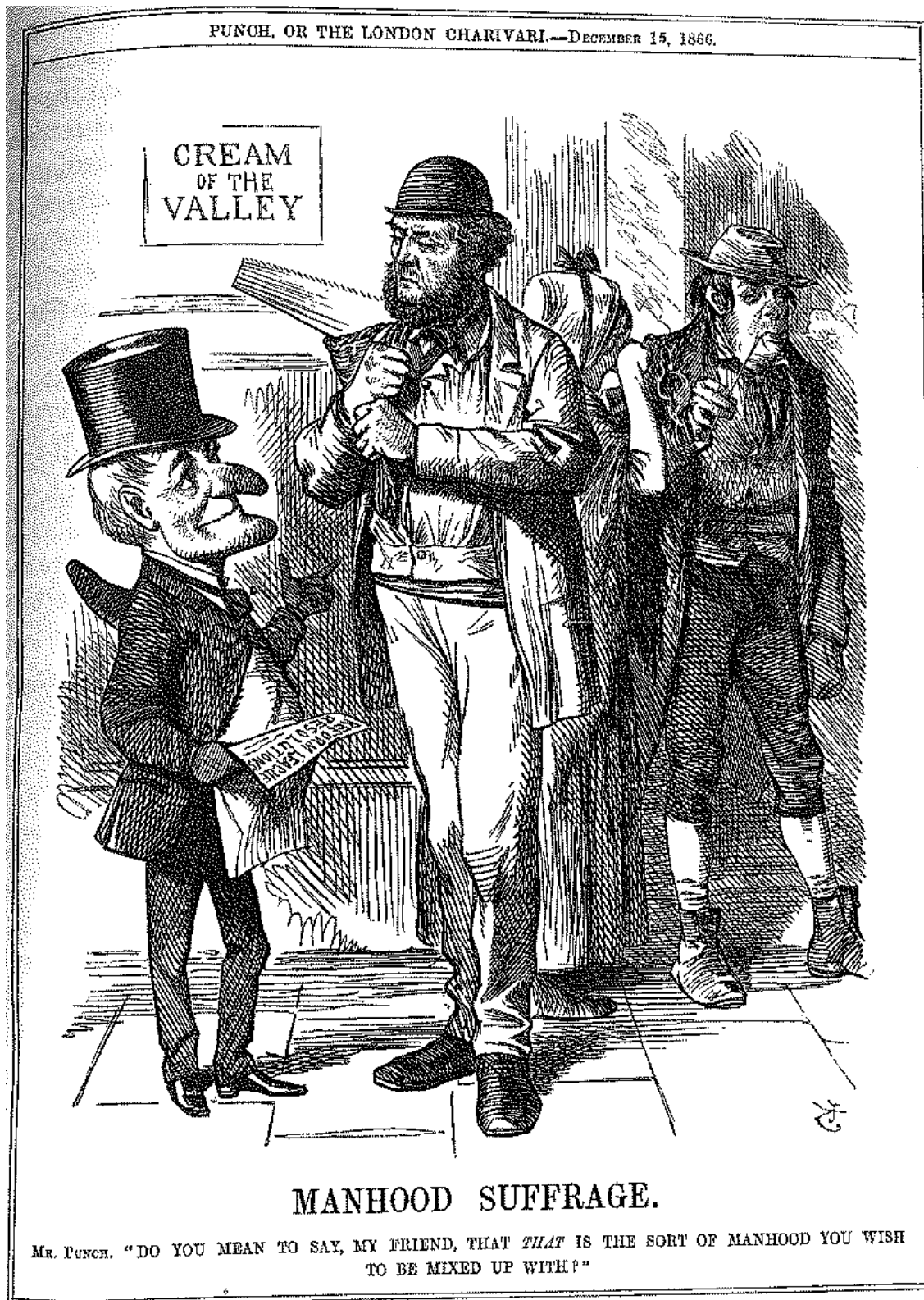


Figure 8: Manhood Suffrage, Punch



Figure 9: Irish Threat to English Constitution

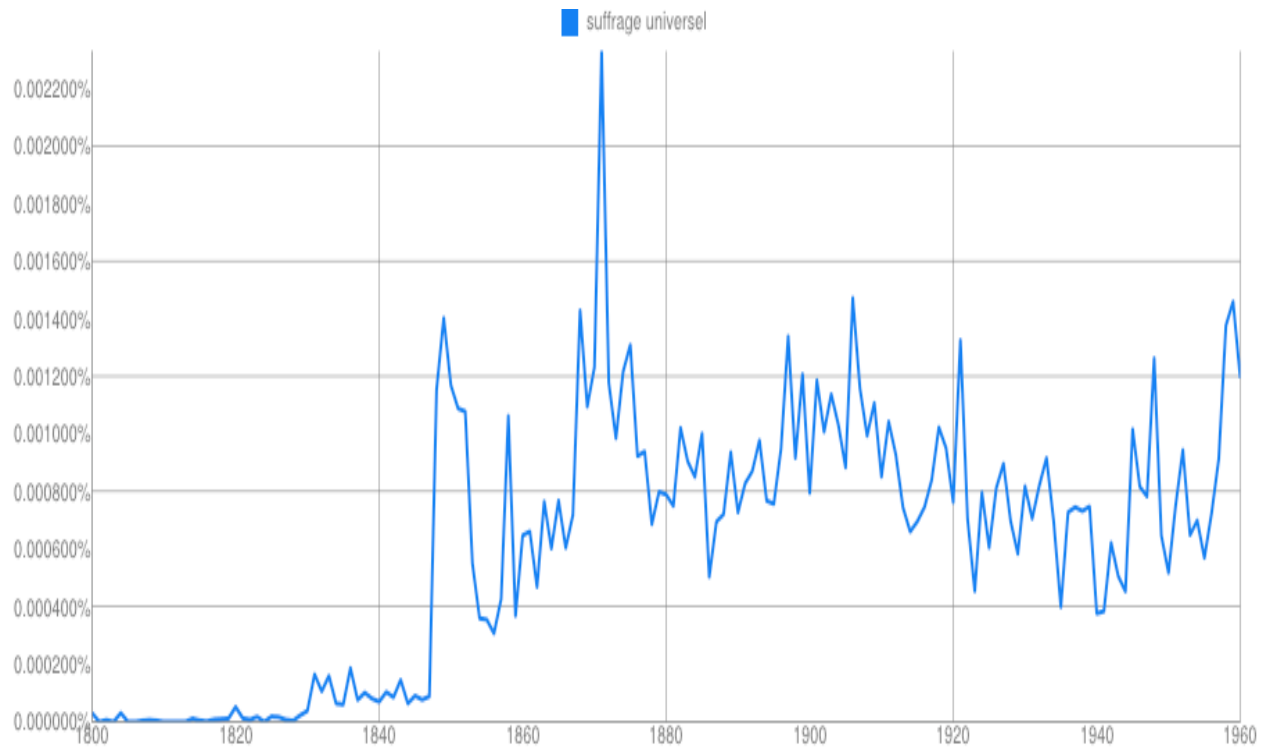


Figure 10: Publications referencing 'suffrage universel' in France, 1800-1960