Suffrage Extension and Political Selection

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Introduction

Motivation

- There is a growing body of evidence that the identity and personal characteristics of politicians influences their decision-making
    - Sociocultural identity (Pande, 2003)
    - Personal financial interests (Tahoun & van Lent, 2013; Machielsen, 2023)
- Changes in the composition and size of the electorate can influence political selection (Dal Bo & Finan, 2018)
- There is a consensus in the literature that franchise extension is correlated with various other reforms such as an expansion of government and increases in taxes (Lindert, 2004)
- Most studies so far have relied on cross-country evidence to identify the influence of suffrage extensions.
    - The studies that do not (Larcinese, 2014; Berlinksi & Dewan, 2011) focus on *district-level* and not *candidate-level* outcomes due to lack of data.

This Study

- This study uses a natural experiment within a country to establish the various consequences of suffrage extensions.
- In the Netherlands, several alterations in the electoral law implementing franchise extension introduced a variable and arguably exogenous new number of voters in electoral districts.
    - I exploit this district-level variation in voters per parliamentary seat following alterations of the electoral law in 1850, 1888 and 1897.
    - The increase in voters per share was likely orthogonal to observable and non-observable characteristics.
    - I identify whether and how electorates' choices changed as a consequence of Dutch franchise extensions, which substantially increased the size and changed the composition of the electorate.
- I also exploit detailed demographic data on *individual candidates* to investigate candidates' vote shares as a function of their personal characteristics.

Overview Results

- At the district-level, the most important result is that relative to districts with smaller suffrage extensions, a larger suffrage extension decreases the pro-reform Liberal party voting share.
    - This could have delayed the way to reforms (Larcinese, 2014; Machielsen, 2023).
- At the candidate-level, I find that the effect of a suffrage extension on a candidate's voting share positively interacts with various measures of **personal wealth**.
    - Using various measures reflecting a decomposition of personal wealth, I find that the effect is the strongest for **real estate**, i.e. the visible component of wealth.
    - I find that the interaction of suffrage extensions with several proxies for education is insignificant
- These findings contribute to the literature on determinants of politicians' quality (e.g. Besley et al, 2005; Daniele & Geys, 2015) and on the motives for suffrage extension (e.g. Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; Lizzeri & Persico, 2004)

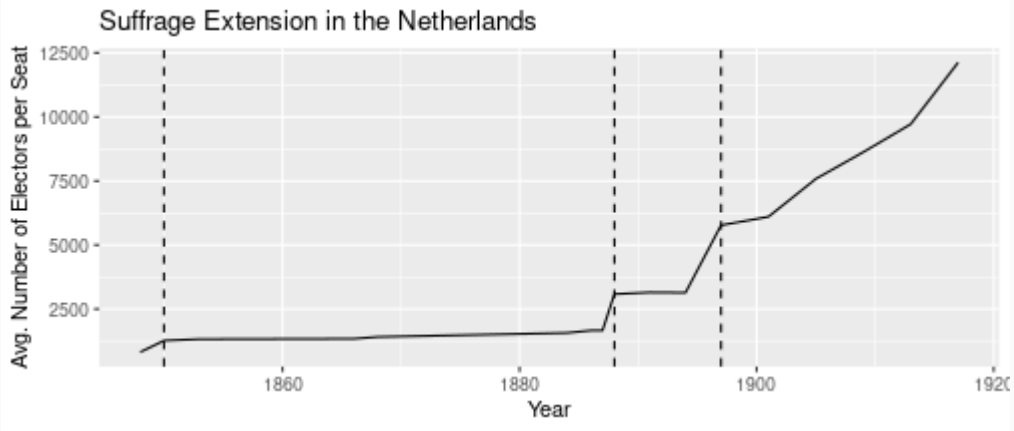
Background

Suffrage Extension

- Before the introduction of universal suffrage in 1918, there were multiple attempts to extend the suffrage
  - The extension in 1850 was a technocratic correction to a first attempt at installing democratic elections in 1848
- The second attempt took place in 1887, as it became increasingly apparent that the connection between suffrage and the census resulted in the exclusion of too many potential voters.
  - Confessional (Christian) politicians insisted on the position of Christian education, whereas liberals focused solely on disassociating suffrage from taxation
  - Result: compromise with notoriously vague criterion for enfranchisement (*signs of suitability and social well-being*)
- The proposals in 1896 (implemented in 1897) introduced two categories for suffrage eligibility:
  - Meeting a census through paying direct taxation and a miscellaneous category known as "declaration," which included paying rent, having passed certain exams
  - Having savings or a pension.

Suffrage Extension

- The graph below shows the pattern of franchise extension over time
  - The three reforms investigated in this study are clearly visible.
- In terms of proportion, 7.3% of the male population was enfranchised in 1848
  - This increased to about 11% in 1851
  - After the reforms in 1888, it reached 27 %
  - In 1909, shortly before the introduction of universal suffrage (1918), it reached about 60%



Data & Methodology

Data Sources

- **Politician data**:
  - Politiek Documentatiecentrum (*PDC*): Biographical information about politicians active at the national level (Lower House, Upper House, Ministers). Party affiliation, birthplace and birthdate. I construct various proxies of a politicians' professional and social background.
- **Non-politician data**:
  - Candidates for lower house elections who were never elected, nor entered politics in another fashion, are not covered in the PDC database.
  - The biographical data is augmented by web-scraped data from geni.com and genealogieonline.nl
- **Municipality-level data**:
  - Historical Database of Dutch Municipalities (*HDNG*): Municipality-level time series data, most notably, on the religious composition of the populace. It also contains data from various professional censuses and taxes paid, which I use to construct control variables at a district-level.

Data Sources

- **Electoral data**:
  - Repository Lower House Elections (*Repositorium Tweede Kamerverkiezingen*): historical repository of electoral outcomes in the Dutch district system (1848-1917).
  - For each unique election, contains the type, election date, list of candidates, amount of votes for each candidate, and turnout.
  - It also contains the *number of enfranchised voters* in each election and the *number of seats* contested in each district.
  - Definition of suffrage extension: *increase* in voters per seat.
- **District-municipality map**:
  - From this repository, it is also possible to derive a district-municipality map (which is time-variant).
- **Miscallaneous data**:
  - Data on the incidence of strikes at the municipality-year level (Van Der Velden, 2000)
  - Data on the personal wealth of politicians and non-politicians (Machielsen, 2023)

Methodology

- I study **three** substantial suffrage extensions in the nineteenth century Netherlands (1850, 1888, 1897)
- Identification strategy leverages variation among electoral districts in the *increase* in votes per seat following each suffrage extension:
- Following Larcinese (2014), the voting shares S in district j in a post-reform election at t can be expressed in terms of the preferences of the previously enfranchised (old) electorate and the newly enfranchised (new) electorate:

$$S_{jt} = \alpha_t + \beta_O \cdot \left(\frac{E_{jt-1}}{E_{jt}} \right) + \beta_N \left(\frac{E_{jt} - E_{jt-1}}{E_{jt}} \right) + \epsilon_{jt}$$

- E_{jt} is defined as the number of voters per seat in district j at time t.
- β_O and β_N denote the proportions of the "old" and "new" electorates respectively, voting, for instance, for a particular party in the election in district j at time t.

Methodology

- For the *same* district, in the pre-reform election (at $t-1$), the outcome can be expressed as:

$$S_{jt-1} = \alpha_{t-1} + \beta_O + \epsilon_{jt-1}$$

- Supposing that the district at time $t-1$ can be used as a counterfactual for the district at time t, had the franchise extension not occurred, we can express the *change* in voting share as:

$$S_{jt} - S_{jt-1} = (\alpha_t - \alpha_{t-1}) + (\beta_N - \beta_O)\left(\frac{E_{jt} - E_{jt-1}}{E_{jt}}\right) + (\epsilon_{jt} - \epsilon_{jt-1})$$

- This strategy controls for *time invariant* (district-specific) factors influencing the vote share
- A threat to identification is the influence of *time variant* factors which are correlated with the shock to suffrage extension
  - I tackle this using *placebo tests* and an *adjustment set*

Synthetic Districts

- **Problem:** shifting district boundaries.
  - Happens in about 35% of the cases. Most of the time, boundary changes are very marginal (i.e. very small municipality shift districts)
- Instead of leaving those observations out, I opt for a generalized way to deal with this:
  - For the actual district j, I look up the municipalities that make up this district at time t.
  - Using the HNDG database, I can then construct a vector of municipality-level variables (defined later) measured at $t-1$ and aggregate them to the district-level.
  - Next, I look up which former districts that existed at time $t-1$ make up the current district j at time t. I do this using the municipalities for district j at time t and consider to what districts they belonged at time $t-1$.

Synthetic Districts

- I then hold that a vector of district-level variables measured at $t-1$ for an (existing) district j at time t can be expressed as a linear combination of the same district-level variables at time $t-1$ of candidate districts:

$$D^{t}_{j,t-1} = \alpha_1 \cdot D^{t-1}_{1,t-1} + \cdots + \alpha_k \cdot D^{t-1}_{k,t-1} + \epsilon$$

- For $D^{t}_{j,t-1}$, I use data on the religious composition of municipalities. In a Dutch setting, this will likely lead to a good approximation for voting behavior, as religious affiliation and voting behavior are highly correlated (Lijphart, 2008)

- I then use a non-negative least squares optimization algorithm with inequality and equality constraints, requiring that $0 \leq \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_k \leq 1$ and $\sum_j \alpha_j = 1$

  - In the special case of no border changes, $\alpha_1 = 1$

Candidate-level Analysis

- Taking candidates' decisions about where to run as given, I can also analyse the impact of suffrage extension on candidate's obtained vote shares:
  - Heterogeneity in the effect of the shock in the electorate on the vote share of candidate i as a function of particular personal characteristics P_i.

$$V_{ijt} = \delta_t + \delta_j + \gamma_1 \cdot \left(\frac{E_{jt} - E_{jt-1}}{E_{jt}} \right) \cdot P_i + \gamma_2 \cdot P_i + \gamma_3 \cdot \left(\frac{E_{jt} - E_{jt-1}}{E_{jt}} \right) + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

Here, γ_1 represents the effect of the interaction between personal characteristic P_i and suffrage increases on vote share net of fixed time and district effects.

- This specification implies that suffrage extensions have a potentially different impact on the vote shares of e.g. wealthier and poorer candidates.

- The principal threat to identification of γ_1 is *differential* selection of politicians to districts in a way that is correlated with their personal characteristics.

  - Optimizing behavior of candidates likely to bias results toward zero
  - I also use a subsample of politicians who competed in the same district at t and $t-1$

Results

Correlates of Suffrage Extension

- After controlling for demographics and past voting shares, a pattern arises:
  - Districts that were *more* Protestant but had little Protestant votes in the past were allocated a larger suffrage extension

Correlates of Suffrage Extension

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
% Gereformeerd	0.362	0.690	0.421	0.418	2.115*
	(0.514)	(0.655)	(0.630)	(0.625)	(1.176)
% Hervormd	0.371	0.191	0.092	0.197	1.880*
	(0.331)	(0.333)	(0.323)	(0.346)	(0.997)
Total Taxes District			0.000	0.000	0.000**
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Total Taxes District t-1				0.000	0.000
				(0.000)	(0.000)
Vote Share Catholic t-2					-0.097
					(0.101)
Vote Share Protestant t-2					-0.152**
					(0.074)
R2 Adj.	0.084	0.253	0.253	0.253	0.407
Num.Obs.	215	202	202	202	171

Note: Fixed effects: district and year. Unreported control variables: population and change in population (1-5). Change in religious composition (2-5). Change in Taxes (4-5). Change in vote shares t-2 to t-1.

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

District-level Results

- Larger suffrage extensions seem to have caused shifts *from* the (pro-Reform) Liberal party toward religious parties
  - The effect is also large: a one-SD increase in suffrage extension would increase the protestant party's share with 10 percentage points!

Effect of Suffrage Extension on Change in Party Vote Shares

	Liberal		Catholic		Protestant	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
E	−0.504***	−1.165***	−0.024	0.364**	0.339*	0.588**
	(0.179)	(0.241)	(0.127)	(0.179)	(0.199)	(0.275)
% Gereformeerd	−0.366	4.135	−0.666	−1.312	0.489	−0.247
	(0.844)	(3.902)	(0.651)	(2.578)	(0.639)	(2.943)
% Hervormd	0.469	4.498	−0.838**	−1.431	1.030**	0.557
	(0.627)	(3.584)	(0.404)	(2.288)	(0.406)	(2.484)
Total Taxes District		0.000		0.000		0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Total Taxes District t-1		0.000		0.000		0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Num.Obs.	215	157	215	157	215	157

Note: Fixed effects: district and year. Standard errors clustered at the district-level. Control variables: religious demographics and change in religious demographics (1-6). Industry decomposition and change in industry composition, personal taxes and change in personal taxes, Catholic and Protestant voting share at t-2 and change from t-2 to t-1. Population and change in population from t-1 to t

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

Candidate-level Results

- Voting share of candidates with *higher* personal wealth increase when franchise extensions tend to be larger

Effect of Suffrage Extension on Candidate Vote Shares

	Total Assets	Shares	Bonds	Real Estate	Dutch Assets	Foreign Assets
Total Assets x E	0.030**					
	(0.014)					
Shares x E		0.064				
		(0.040)				
Bonds x E			0.011			
			(0.021)			
Real Estate x E				0.041*		
				(0.024)		
Dutch Assets x E					0.029**	
					(0.012)	
Foreign Assets x E						−0.001
						(0.067)
E	−0.204	−0.164	−0.115	−0.190	−0.192	−0.112
	(0.227)	(0.242)	(0.255)	(0.225)	(0.232)	(0.254)
Num.Obs.	241	241	241	241	241	241
R2 Adj.	0.347	0.341	0.348	0.358	0.348	0.335

Note: Fixed effects: district, year, political party. Standard errors clustered at the district-level. Control variables: district-level controls same as previous table. Individual-level controls: incumbency status, first timer status

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

Candidate-level Results

- Not a lot of evidence that other personal characteristics influenced candidates' vote shares

Effect of Suffrage Extension on Candidate Vote Shares

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Law Background x E	0.082				
	(0.068)				
Nobility x E		0.118			
		(0.123)			
PhD x E			0.065		
			(0.181)		
Young x E				−0.004	
				(0.059)	
Recommended x E					0.170
					(0.129)
E	0.040	0.046	0.083	0.072	−0.083
	(0.139)	(0.126)	(0.134)	(0.133)	(0.166)
Num.Obs.	367	367	367	367	367
R2 Adj.	0.368	0.371	0.365	0.365	0.401

Note: Fixed effects: district, year, political party. Standard errors clustered at the district-level. Control variables: district-level controls same as previous table. Individual-level controls: incumbency status, first timer status

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

Conclusion

Conclusion

- I study the influence of suffrage extension on political selection.
  - Suffrage extensions were slightly correlated with various observables, consistent with some opportunism
- Suffrage extensions appear to have had a clear *negative* effect on the Liberal party vote share, and a *positive* effect on Protestant and Catholic parties
  - This happened against the backdrop of a *pro*-Reform Liberal party, whereas Catholics and Protestant parties took a more conservative stance on issues such as fiscal legislation and government intervention
- The results on the candidate-level are congruent with the district-level results
  - Keeping political party and several other personal characteristics fixed, a large suffrage extension causes the effect of personal wealth on vote share to be *positive* and mitigates potential electoral costs to excessive wealth
  - View that arises: electorates switch to different parties and different politicians within parties (cf. Acemoglu, 2000)

Thank you for your attention!

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