

THE EFFICIENT SECRET

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INSTITUTIONS AND DECISIONS

Editors

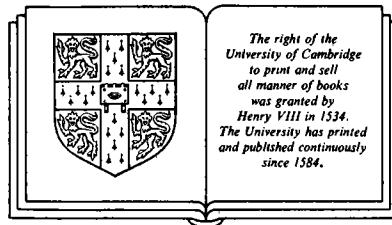
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THE EFFICIENT SECRET

*The Cabinet and the development of political
parties in Victorian England*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521327794

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First published 1987
This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Cox, Gary W.

The efficient secret.

(Political economy of institutions and decisions)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Political parties – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
 2. Elections – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
 3. Voting – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
 4. Cabinet system – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
 5. Great Britain – Politics and government – 19th century.
- I. Title. II. Series.

JN1120.C69 1987 324.241'009 86-17517

ISBN-13 978-0-521-32779-4 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-32779-2 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-01901-9 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-01901-X paperback

To Elizabeth Frost Broadway

The efficient secret of the English Constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers. . . . The connecting link is *the cabinet*.

Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 1865

Contents

<i>List of tables and figures</i>	<i>page ix</i>
<i>Series editors' preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>

PART I INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction and outline	3
2 The historical setting	9

PART II THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCIPLINED PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES

3 The measurement and theory of party cohesion	21
4 The Peelites and the disruption of the party system	32
5 The caucus	37
6 The origin of the efficient secret	45
7 The electoral connection and ministerial ambition	68
8 The Cabinet's strength: threats of resignation and dissolution	80

PART III THE ELECTORATE

9 The development of a party-oriented electorate	91
10 The causes of a party-oriented electorate	113
11 The legislative consequences of a party-oriented electorate	137
12 The influence of constituents in Victorian England	148

Contents

PART IV
CONCLUSION

13 The history of party voting	169
--------------------------------	-----

<i>Appendix</i>	171
<i>References</i>	177
<i>Author index</i>	183
<i>Subject index</i>	185

Tables and figures

TABLES

2.1	Expansion of the press, 1824–86	page 13
3.1	Intra-party unity: cohesion, simple averages	23
3.2	Intra-party unity: cohesion, weighted averages	23
3.3	Intra-party unity: cohesion on unwhipped votes	24
3.4	Inter-party differences: index of likeness, simple averages	24
3.5	Numbers and percentages of whipped divisions	24
5.1	Conservative discipline as a function of Conservative organization	42
5.2	Changes in Conservative discipline and organization	43
6.1	Speaking in Parliament, 1820–96	53
6.2	Voting participation in Parliament, 1836–99	54
6.3	Size of constituency and speaking in Parliament	58
6.4	Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1841–47	58
6.5	Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1852–57	59
6.6	Amendments carried against the government whips	64
7.1	Incumbents in English provincial boroughs, 1835–1900	73
7.2	Incumbents in English counties, 1835–80	74
7.3	Tenure in the House of Commons by period of entry	76
7.4	Party support of those who later received ministerial posts	78
9.1	Vote count for election of 1874 in Pontefract	96
9.2	Available vote counts, 1818–1910	99
9.3	Usable vote counts, 1818–1910	100
9.4	Trends in split voting, 1818–1910	103
9.5	Trends in non-partisan plumping, 1818–1910	108

Tables and figures

9.6	Split voting and non-partisan plumping, 1832–1910	109
9.7	Split voting by contest type, 1832–1910	110
10.1	Percentage of English boroughs having local Conservative organizations in 1874, by size and competitiveness	129
10.2	Correlation between split voting and number of voters	130
10.3	Split voting in borough contests with three candidates	131
11.1	Number of candidates at contested elections in double- member English provincial boroughs, 1835–1900	138
12.1	Split voting as a function of crossbench dissent	155
12.2	Crossbench dissent as a function of split voting	158
12.3	Agreement of pairs of English MPs who did and did not share constituency	162

FIGURES

9.1	Trends in split voting, 1818–1910	104
9.2	Trends in split voting, as measured by the median and first and third quartiles	111
10.1	The effect of issues on the party system	123

Series editors' preface

The Cambridge series on the Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions is built around attempts to answer two central questions: How do institutions evolve in response to individual incentives, strategies, and choices; and how do institutions affect the performance of political and economic systems? The scope of the series is comparative and historical rather than international or specifically American, and the focus is positive rather than normative.

Gary Cox's work seeks to show when and explain why party became the dominant influence on voting behavior in nineteenth century England. It is path-breaking in two respects. First, whereas it has long been known that party voting among MPs increased dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century, Cox's work is the first to document conclusively a parallel rise in party voting among voters. Second, Cox offers a novel explanation of a key nineteenth century institutional change – the centralization of legislative initiative in the Cabinet after the first Reform Act – and clarifies the important impact of this change on popular and parliamentary voting behavior. In so doing, he systematically analyzes the interaction between Victorian constituencies and their MPs and shows how this interaction was affected by the declining parliamentary powers of backbenchers and by the rapidly changing political and economic context.

Thus, Cox's work demonstrates how political and economic outcomes reflect choices constrained by institutions, while also asking why and how, in view of the outcomes, such institutions developed.

Preface

The development of “modern” political parties is a leading theme of nineteenth century political history. In the United States, in England, and on the Continent a set of broadly similar events radically transformed the way in which politics was conducted. Political parties were at the center of these developments. The electoral organization of parties became more and more elaborate with each successive extension of the suffrage; the use of party labels by candidates became increasingly common; and the allegiance of voters to political parties rather than to individuals became more and more widespread.

This book describes and attempts to explain the fascinating and, in cumulation, revolutionary changes that took place in the English party system during the nineteenth century. Substantively, the book focuses on two key institutional changes – the development of the Cabinet’s *legislative* powers (the efficient secret) and the expansion of the electorate – and traces their effects on the dramatic increase in party voting both in Parliament (Part II) and in the electorate (Part III). Because these substantive interests focus on the behavior of large aggregates of people, I have, whenever possible and appropriate, sought statistical evidence to support my arguments. This has entailed, among other things, the extensive and systematic use of poll books and newspapers in order to gather detailed electoral returns, the use of computerized lists of divisions in the House of Commons, and the use of a census of local Conservative party associations conducted in 1874.

In gathering these statistical data, I have incurred a number of debts of gratitude. The University Research Institute of the University of Texas at Austin and the National Science Foundation (SES-8306032) made possible a research trip to England in the summer of 1983, during which I collected most of the electoral data on which the book is based. F. W. S. Craig kindly gave me the benefit of his considerable experience in data

Preface

collection at this time. The Institute of Historical Research at the University of London greatly facilitated the research process by its policy of having its entire collection of poll books in open stacks. As regards data on voting in Parliament, I am grateful to W. O. Aydelotte, John R. Bylsma, James C. Hamilton, Lance E. Davis, and Robert A. Huttenback, all of whom allowed me to use data that they had collected. H. J. Hanham was kind enough to supply me with a xerographic copy of his own copy of the census of Conservative party associations mentioned above.

There is more to a book than data, of course, and I have benefitted from the help of others in many areas other than data collection. Several research assistants have helped in the coding and preparation of the data for analysis, as well as other tasks: Grace Dunn, Michael Goodman, Jeff Sutter, Lee Ann Banaszak, Scott Ingram, and Steven Knowlton. The word processing of the too many drafts of this book was expertly performed by the secretaries in the School of Business at Washington University in St. Louis: Carla Stricklin, Linda Clemons, Phyllis Janish, Mary Blair, Kathy Illyes, and Victoria Siegel. Carla Stricklin deserves special mention for her preparation of the final manuscript.

This book began as my dissertation at the California Institute of Technology, and the efforts and encouragement of my dissertation advisors, Bruce E. Cain and J. Morgan Kousser, are still appreciated. More recently, I have benefitted from the comments of the participants in the Thursday night seminars at Washington University; those of Richard W. Davis, James E. Alt, and Douglass C. North have been particularly helpful.

PART I

Introduction

I

Introduction and outline

Modern British government is government by party leaders in Cabinet. It is still the “Crown in Parliament” which formally takes or authorizes every legislative or administrative action, but of the three major components of this composite entity – the Commons, the Lords, and the Sovereign – the first is now virtually unchecked. The House of Lords can only minimally delay acts of the elected assembly, and both the Lords and the Monarch have long since lost their ability to veto (much less initiate) legislation. Since the Cabinet controls the agenda of the House of Commons and generally consists solely of the leaders of the party with a majority of seats in the Commons, and since the influence of party on voting in Parliament is extremely strong, the Commons itself has in essence retained only a veto and, to a lesser extent, an amendment power over the legislative proposals of the majority party’s leaders who sit in the Cabinet. As a recent essay on legislation in Britain notes, today’s conventional wisdom is that “parliament has relinquished any capacity for legislative initiative it may once have possessed to the executive in its midst” (Walkland and Ryle 1981: 91).¹

Corresponding to this widely accepted view of a party-dominated legislative process is a conception of parliamentary elections as essentially methods of choosing which party shall rule. Electoral organization is dominated by the parties rather than by individual candidates, and it is for parties rather than individuals that British voters are generally thought to vote. Representation in modern Britain is conceived of as almost exclusively “national” and party-based. What might be called “local” representation, where each MP acts as a delegate or trustee of his constituents’ specific policy concerns, is scarcely mentioned at all.²

¹This conventional wisdom is perhaps best suited to the mid-twentieth century, and it has recently been attacked as regards the 1970s – see Schwarz (1980), for example.

²Here again, the 1970s have given something of a shock to these views. See Butler and Kavanagh (1980: 407–10) and Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1984).

Introduction

The topic of this work, broadly construed, is the historical development of the system of representative democracy just sketched. Obviously, this is a vast topic, and a number of limitations have been observed. Geographically, as the title suggests, we deal only with England; Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are left untouched. Temporally, we confine the enquiry mostly to the years between the first (1832) and third (1884) Reform Acts. Substantively, we focus on certain aspects of the development of English political parties. In order to indicate just what those aspects are, it will be useful to recall the conventional division of political parties into extra-parliamentary electoral organizations (the party organization), intra-parliamentary groupings (the party-in-government), and followers or adherents in the voting public (the party-in-the-electorate).³

Much of what has been written in political science concerning the development of parties (English or otherwise) in the nineteenth century focuses on the first of these aspects – party organization. In Duverger's influential comparative analysis, western parties in general are seen as having developed in three characteristic stages: first the creation of parliamentary groups, then the organization of electoral committees to channel the votes of an expanding electorate, and finally the permanent linkage of these two elements (Duverger 1955: xxiii–xxxvii). LaPalombara and Weiner (1966) also use the establishment of permanent local party associations (in regular communication with national units) as a defining characteristic of modern parties.

Here, in contrast, party organization will be only a secondary concern. While important, it is by no means the only part of the developmental story; changes within the party-in-government and party-in-the-electorate were just as striking, and it is with these that we shall be primarily concerned. In particular, we seek to explain the evolution of two crucial behavioral aspects of the modern English polity: the marked regularity with which MPs vote with their parties, and the strong tendency of voters to vote for parties rather than individuals. Put another way, this book seeks to show when and explain why party became the dominant influence on voting behavior in England – both in the legislature and in the electorate.

The first of these topics is relatively well trodden ground. Owing to Lowell's pioneering quantitative research at the turn of the century, it has long been known that intra-party cohesion in the House of Commons increased markedly, from levels in the 1850s comparable to those found in American legislatures to levels in the 1890s comparable to the high standards set by mid-twentieth century Parliaments (Lowell 1902).

³The use of these terms was popularized by Key (1964).

Introduction and outline

There have been few studies of party voting in the electorate, however, and those that exist yield conflicting pictures. It will be demonstrated here that the development of party voting in the electorate followed a pattern remarkably similar to that found in the legislature.

This of course suggests that the two developments were causally related, and a further aim of the book is to unravel and clarify this relationship. This involves several steps, including the detailed exposition of the actual pattern of evidence on voting behavior in the electorate and in the legislature; investigation of the interaction between MPs and their constituents; examination of the possible impact of party organization; and, most important, identification of the myriad effects of two major institutional changes, which act as our chief independent variables: the extension of the suffrage and the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet.

The extension of the suffrage is of course a familiar theme in studies of the development of parties. As a general rule, large alterations in the size of the voting population, whether increases or decreases, intended or unintended, have had profound and multifarious effects on political parties – whether one speaks of late seventeenth and eighteenth century England (Plumb 1967), late eighteenth century America (Charles 1956), the post-Civil War American South (Kousser 1974), or any of a number of other instances. More specifically, the major comparative studies of party development (Weber 1946; Duverger 1955; LaPalombara and Weiner 1966) have strongly linked extension of the suffrage to the evolution of party organization. Here the connection between size and party organization will be examined quantitatively, using cross-sectional evidence available from a census of party organizations conducted by the Conservative Central Office in 1874. More important, we shall also examine the impact of the growth of the electorate on MPs' campaign strategies and on their behavior in Parliament. The exigencies of electoral politics in the newly expanded constituencies, we shall argue, were intimately related to the increasing legislative power of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet had had imposing executive powers since its inception in the late seventeenth century, but it was only in the nineteenth century, and largely after the passage of the first Reform Act in 1832, that it achieved a virtual monopoly of legislative initiative as well. The “nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers” in the Cabinet was what Walter Bagehot proclaimed in 1865 to be the “efficient secret” of English government (Bagehot 1865), and the development of this efficient secret – of a Cabinet with both executive and legislative preeminence – has been a central concern of English constitutional historians ever since.

Introduction

Nonetheless, a major theme in the study of the efficient secret – the interaction of the Cabinet and the electorate – has received little in the way of sustained investigation. This book seeks to fill that gap.

CONTENTS

The remaining chapter of Part I and the first three chapters of Part II set the stage for the main analysis that begins in Chapter 6. Chapter 2 provides a brief and selective overview of nineteenth century political and economic events. Chapter 3 documents the dramatic increase in party cohesion in Parliament, and Chapters 4 and 5 dispense with some possible explanations for this increase that are suggested in the literature.

Chapter 6 then turns to the origin of the efficient secret, seeking to explain how and why the fusion of executive and legislative powers in the Cabinet was achieved in the generation after the first Reform Act. While to some degree accepting the traditional explanations offered for this development (Redlich 1908; Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968), which focus on the expansion of the economy, Chapter 6 also attempts to go beyond previous research – both as regards the description of what the actual pattern of institutional change was and as regards the reasons underlying it. In particular, we emphasize the important effects that the requirements of electoral politics in the expanded constituencies had on the operation and procedure of the House of Commons.

The remainder of the book after Chapter 6 is largely concerned with the consequences that the rise of the Cabinet had for voting behavior in Parliament (Chapters 7 and 8) and in the constituencies (Part III). Chapter 7 begins with the observation that the Cabinet's increasing importance made positions there, and in the ministry as a whole, more desirable. Since the Prime Minister held the key to these positions, he had an increasingly attractive reward with which to induce discipline. Although more attention has been paid to ministerial ambition as a cause of party loyalty later in the twentieth century, its development in the late nineteenth century may plausibly be viewed as contributing to the evolution of cohesive parties, and Chapter 7 investigates this possibility.

Two other developments intimately connected with the increasing legislative power of the Cabinet were the government's duty or right to either resign or dissolve Parliament when defeated on crucial legislation (it had had such a duty in regard to administration since the seventeenth century). The "duty" to resign was often the "right" to threaten resignation; on matters of importance, the Cabinet might pressure its adherents by threatening to resign unless supported, thus changing the vote from one concerning the merits of the bill to one concerning the overall merit of the government. The ministry might in a similar fashion threaten

Introduction and outline

dissolution, although the effects of this threat were somewhat more complicated. Both these “rights” of the ministry – to threaten resignation and to threaten dissolution – have often been identified as important factors explaining the discipline of late nineteenth and twentieth century British parties; and the development of these rights has been suggested as a cause of the increasing trend in party cohesion. Chapter 8 investigates the viability of these assertions.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with voting behavior in the English electorate from 1818 to 1918. Down to the passage of the Ballot Act of 1872, English electors voted publicly and *viva voce*, and most students of nineteenth century elections have focused on the fascinating social, political, and economic consequences of this electoral publicity. Thus, for example, a major theme of Victorian electoral studies concerns the bribery of electors. When voting was public, one could verify that one’s bribe had had the intended effect, and bribery was a common feature of Victorian elections. More generally, political historians have emphasized that public voting allowed the transference of any kind of socio-economic creditorship into electoral currency; thus, landlords could often influence the votes of their tenants, customers the votes of the shopkeepers they patronized, and so forth.

The contrast between the researches of historical psephologists and modern studies of elections held under the secret ballot is striking. The dominant themes in the study of twentieth century British electoral behavior are (1) the marked degree to which voters in parliamentary elections view their choice as one between national parties rather than as one between two or more local candidates, and (2) the marked degree to which this choice between parties is determined by the voter’s social class. Nowhere does one find much discussion of the kind of electoral influence which occupies students of the Victorian era. And, on the other hand, it has only been recently that twentieth century interests have crept back into Victorian studies. The work of Cornford (1964) and of Wald (1983) has explored in great detail the development of class-based voting in the later nineteenth century – the second of the themes listed above.

This book, and in particular Chapter 9, explores the first theme – the development of a party-oriented electorate. In so doing, it takes advantage of some distinctively English documentary sources. Before the massive redistricting of 1885, most English constituencies returned two members to Parliament. Moreover, election results in these constituencies were often reported in documents sufficiently detailed so that the number and percentage of voters who split their (two) votes between the parties are readily available. Using these invaluable electoral documents, we have computed nation-wide trends in split voting from 1818 to 1918. The statistics on split voting allow a fairly clear answer to the question of

Introduction

when English elections began to turn chiefly on partisan as opposed to personal factors.

In order to clarify *why* party voting increased when it did, Chapter 10 examines the linkage between the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet and voting in the electorate. A standard argument as to why twentieth century Britons tend to vote for parties rather than individuals runs as follows: British voters can register an opinion on the executive only through their vote for MP; the Cabinet is the effective focus of power, and the individual MP typically has an insignificant impact on the direction of policy; hence voters tend to base their vote decisions chiefly on their preferences for the executive. Chapter 10 relates this idea of parliamentary elections as choices of the executive to the evidence on increased party voting in the electorate. The effect of the expansion of the electorate is also investigated.

Chapters 11 and 12 explore the linkage between voting behavior in the electorate and in the legislature. Essentially this linkage deals with the relationship of represented to representative, and in particular with the influence of constituents over their MPs. We argue that the development of party discipline in Parliament went hand in hand with – indeed, was to a considerable extent caused by – a significant alteration in the relationship of MPs and their constituents. In particular, Chapter 11 shows that the development of party voting in the electorate ought in theory to have led to a reduction in constituency-inspired dissidence, and Chapter 12 provides evidence that such dissidence did in fact decline in the 1870s and 1880s.

2

The historical setting

It would be difficult to overstate the magnitude of change in nineteenth century Britain. In a country which preened itself on the smoothness of its political adaptation and on its avoidance of the violent revolutions that rocked the Continent, political change was nonetheless massive, and no major institution of the polity escaped the century without fundamental alteration. In a country whose best economists at the beginning of the century believed that large increases in population, given a fixed supply of other factors of production (in particular, land), could only lead to famine, the population nonetheless quadrupled at the same time that the real product per capita also quadrupled (Deane and Cole 1967: 282). In this chapter we sketch the broad outline of political and economic events. The purpose is chiefly to provide some of the general historical background that readers who are not Victorian historians may require. The discussion in the second section also covers some topics – in particular, the expansion of the press and the alteration of the rules of procedure of both private and public legislation – that are important in later chapters.

THE COURSE OF POLITICS

The best-known landmarks of nineteenth century British political history remain the three Reform Acts, which, in the Whig interpretation, punctuated the march from an aristocratic and factional politics, prevalent in the early years of the century, to a democratic and party-based politics at the end of the century. The greatest watershed was perhaps the first Reform Act, passed in 1832. Before 1832, the electoral system had been based on the enfranchisement of particular communities: the counties and the parliamentary boroughs, each such constituency typically returning two members to Parliament. Within the boundaries of the geographically defined constituencies, local customs and special enactments determined

Introduction

which men were actually allowed to vote, with the result that the franchise approximated universal manhood suffrage in a few places, was confined to a small corporation in others, and dwindled to a single elector in the rotten boroughs of Old Sarum and Gatton. The first Reform Act did away with some of the worst anomalies of this system by, first, wholly or partly disfranchising eighty-six of the smallest boroughs; second, distributing the seats thus freed to newly created county divisions and to some of the larger cities – e.g., Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds – that had previously been unrepresented in Parliament; third, taking a step toward uniformity in the franchise by granting the vote in all boroughs to those occupying a house worth ten pounds a year (thereby, with other provisions, allowing a 50–80% increase in the national electorate); and fourth, providing for the creation of registers of voters. Notwithstanding the apparent importance of these changes, historians have emphasized that most of the features of the unreformed system survived the Act. Although the utterly rotten boroughs were gone, 39% of English boroughs still had registered electorates of fewer than 500; although the manufacturing interest now had a sizable voice in Parliament, the northern industrial counties and London were still greatly underrepresented (in terms of both population and wealth); although many constituencies now had competitive elections, proprietary or pocket boroughs, the seats of which were essentially in the gift of certain powerful noblemen and commoners, persisted; and electoral influence, corruption, and violence remained, in the view of many historians, the chief determinants of election results.

The second Reform Act, passed in 1867, was to some extent intended to get rid of the more glaring abuses that remained after 1832. The smallest boroughs, those deemed most susceptible to influence, were wholly or partly disfranchised, new boroughs and county divisions being given seats. The franchise in the counties was enlarged and that in the boroughs extended to all householders, with the practical result that the registered electorate in England nearly doubled between 1865, the last pre-reform election, and 1868, the first post-reform election. Once again, the representative system was brought more in line (but by no means completely in line) with demographic and economic conditions.

After the report of the Hartington Committee in 1870 revealed the extent to which corrupt practices and “undue” influence had survived the reform, Parliament adopted vote by secret ballot in 1872 (the Ballot Act). Corruption does seem to have changed in form after passage of the Ballot Act (Hanham 1969: 291–93), but the election of 1880 was considered particularly corrupt by contemporaries, and as a result the first rigorous regulation of campaign expenditures and corrupt practices was enacted in 1883. The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of that year did

The historical setting

away with the old system of paid canvassers and imposed stringent expenditure limits. For the first time it became necessary to recruit *volunteer* campaign workers on a large scale, and this “provided a very important stimulant to the development of the mass party in [England]” (McKenzie 1963: 164).

The last nineteenth century expansion of the electorate came a year later with the passage of the third Reform Act. The English and Welsh electorate was increased by about 76%, and topped the four million mark. The redistricting of 1885 completely disfranchised 79 and partially disfranchised 36 of the smaller constituencies in the process of a comprehensive restructuring of the electoral system: before 1885, 57% (and before 1867, 70%) of the English and Welsh districts returned two members, whereas after 1885 only 8% did so. For the first time, almost all districts were single-member. Also for the first time, London and the northern industrial counties had a fair share of the representation on the basis of population.

Concomitant with the important legal changes in the electoral system – the expansion of the electorate, the introduction of the secret ballot, the regulation of campaign expenditures, the switch from multiple- to single-member districts – were myriad other changes in the political and economic systems. Some of these are the main subjects of later chapters – as for example the organizational growth of the parties, the development of party voting both in Parliament and in the electorate, and the evolution of Cabinet government. What we shall turn to next is a brief sketch of economic and demographic changes and some of their immediate political effects.

THE ECONOMY AND POPULATION

Britain during the nineteenth century was an expanding society. Between 1780 and 1860 the population almost tripled. At the same time, the center of population moved toward the towns and the north. The proportion of the English and Welsh population living in urban areas (those with 2,500 or more inhabitants) nearly doubled between 1801 and 1871, from 33.8% to 65.2% (Bedarida 1979: 17); and the four most industrial counties (all in the north and Midlands – the West Riding of Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Lancashire) increased from 17% of the population in 1781 to 26% in 1861 (Floud and McCloskey 1981: 106). Moreover, the fastest rate of growth was in the largest towns: for every English and Welsh person living in a city of 100,000 or more in 1801, there were three in 1871 – at which point nearly a third of the total population resided in such cities.

All previous experience would have led to the conclusion that real

Introduction

income per worker should have declined as a consequence of the increase in population. The doubling of the English population in the sixteenth century, for example, had cut income per worker in half. Moreover, the best current economic reasoning also predicted a decline in per capita income: for – so argued Ricardo and Malthus – if some factors of production are held constant, then a trebled population will be unable to treble output. The law of diminishing returns presaged a dismal future for an expanding society.

“What was extraordinary about the industrial revolution,” as McCloskey puts it, “is that better land, better machines and better people so decisively overcame diminishing returns” (Floud and McCloskey 1981: 108). Malthus and Ricardo were not just wrong, they were spectacularly wrong. This was in part because increased capital investment increased the number of tools and machines per worker. But, more important, the quality of tools and machines, and the knowledge of men, also increased. Thus, for example, innovations in preparing, spinning, and weaving cotton reduced the cost of resources needed to produce a piece of cotton cloth eight-fold over the eighty years from 1780 to 1860. A similar story played out for wool: the resource cost of worsteds fell about 1.8% per year, that of woolens about .9% per year. Indeed, textiles, together with just a few other sectors – iron, canals and railways, and coastal and foreign shipping – accounted for nearly half the total productivity growth in the economy. These were the bellwether sectors setting the pace for modern economic growth. Other sectors, however – e.g., machinery and implements, chemicals, pottery, glass, gasworks, tanning – also experienced technical change and a growth in productivity. Inventiveness was on the rise, as is suggested by the sheer number of English patents sealed in each decade: 22 in 1700–09, 477 in 1780–89, 4,581 in 1840–49.

In addition to a growth of productivity within sectors, the economy underwent massive structural change. The occupational distribution of the labor force is perhaps the clearest index. Roughly, two main periods can be discerned, during which change in the distribution of the labor force took characteristically different shapes. First, during the opening three decades of the century, agriculture and manufacturing industry traded places in relative importance, with agriculture’s percentage of the labor force falling about 11 points, from 36% to 25%, and industry’s percentage increasing about 11 points, from 30% to 41%. Second, during the remainder of the century, agriculture’s share continued to fall rapidly, but industry no longer picked up all the released labor. Instead, the fastest-growing sector was trade and transport. The percentage of the labor force employed in trade and transport rose from 12.4% in 1831 (just before

The historical setting

Table 2.1. *Expansion of the press, 1824–86*

Year	Number of newspapers in the United Kingdom	Number of newspapers in provincial England
1824	266	135
1856	795	375
1871	1,450	851
1886	2,093	1,225

Source: Vincent (1966: 65)

the railway boom of the 1830s) to 22.6% in 1891 (Deane and Cole 1967: 142).

A larger population, greater productivity in each sector, and a structural shift toward manufacturing industry and transport all contributed to economic growth. The result of this growth was that Britain was far and away the dominant economy of the nineteenth century. By one estimate, England controlled in 1850 over 40% of the world's trade in manufactured goods. By another estimate, her capacity in the modern industrial sectors amounted in 1860 to 40–45% of world capacity. Yet another estimate holds that as late as 1870 she produced nearly one-third of all the articles manufactured in the world (Crouzet 1982: 4–5).

The importance of Britain's economic growth for the political system in general is beyond the scope of this work. But two particular instances of economic growth – the expansion of the newspaper industry and the development of the railroad – are both illustrative of general trends and relevant to arguments made in later chapters.

Expansion of the press

The political press grew amazingly rapidly: where there were 135 English provincial newspapers in 1824, there were 1,225 sixty years later (see Table 2.1). And it was not just the number of newspapers that changed: their size and circulation increased enormously as well.

The causes of this great expansion of the press were many. In part, the press grew because of a tremendous growth in the potential demand for newspapers. The population was growing rapidly, and education was expanding literacy. At the same time, economic development was swelling the demand for advertising.

The press grew also because of the relaxation and ultimate removal of the “taxes on knowledge.” In 1833 the advertisement duty was lowered, and in 1836 the newspaper stamp duty and paper duty were cut.

Introduction

In 1853 the advertisement duty was abolished, followed in 1855 by the stamp duty and in 1861 by the paper duty. Musson (1958: 411) noted:

Each of these fiscal relaxations resulted in newspaper expansions. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, was thereby enabled to lower its price from sevenpence in 1821 to fourpence in 1836, twopence in 1855, and a penny in 1857; to change from a weekly publication in 1821 to a bi-weekly in 1836 and a daily in 1855; to expand in size from a mere four-page folio in 1821 to sixteen or more considerably bigger pages by the early years of this century; and to increase its circulation from about 3,000 a week in 1828 to ... over 40,000 daily by the late 1880s.

Notwithstanding the growth in demand for newspapers and the removal of legal obstacles, newspaper growth of such magnitude would not have been possible without revolutionary technical improvements. Railways, by improving postal service and allowing journalists to travel faster and farther, began to transform methods of collecting news. The invention of the electric telegraph had an even greater impact on news gathering techniques beginning in the late 1840s. For the first time, provincial newspapers could report news from London, Europe, and America in a timely fashion. Sometimes this was with the help of the new telegraphic agencies, such as Reuter's (founded in 1851). But the larger newspapers established their own telegraphic capability.

As a consequence of the telegraph, elections were quickened and broadened; *The Times* noted in 1859 that whereas elections used to drag on for months,

we now live in an age of steam, and the phases of the contest succeed each other with startling rapidity.... Not only have the leading statesmen of all parties addressed their constituents, but every electoral body has had an opportunity of scrutinizing the appeals addressed to every other.... Electors are no longer confined to the communications of their own candidates. They can peruse, contrast, and criticise a dozen addresses at a time, ... and deduce perhaps rather a broader moral than any particular candidate intended to convey.¹

None of these remarkable changes would have had the impact they did if methods of printing had not been revolutionized. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, printing had changed comparatively little since Caxton. Type was still produced by hand with simple equipment in small foundries, and set by hand using the composing stick. Printing was still done on the handpress, with a typical rate of output of about 200–250 impressions per hour. Improvements were rapid in the new century. Friedrich Koenig invented a practical steam-driven printing machine in 1811 capable of over 1,000 impressions per hour. This was improved on by others so that by 1827 there were machines capable of 5,000–

¹*The Times*, London, 11 April 1859, p. 8.

The historical setting

6,000 sheets per hour. Further speed waited on the development of rotary printing. Augustus Applegarth first overcame the practical difficulties in 1846, and 10,000–12,000 sheets per hour was possible (Musson 1958).

In the second half of the 1850s, after the further development of rotary printing and the removal of the stamp duty, the price of newspapers fell generally to a penny. This new affordability, together with the timely flow of telegraphic news from London and abroad, assured that the newspaper would assume a more important role in local politics and also that provincial opinion could begin to affect the House of Commons on almost a day-to-day basis. Some of the specific effects of the emergence of the penny press are discussed in Chapter 10.

The railroad and the steam locomotive

The tonic of steam power was, of course, not limited to the newspaper industry. A working steam carriage had been devised as early as 1801. For a few decades steam was used chiefly in collieries, but the opening of the Stockton and Darlington line in 1825 heralded the age of the passenger locomotive. Railway building booms swept Britain in 1836 and again in the 1840s, so that by 1847 five thousand miles of main line track – or about one-third of what was ultimately attained in the 1880s – had been laid.

The economic impact of the railroad was of course profound. The railroad also had a number of direct implications for politics. In particular, its development illustrates how an increasingly complex economy vastly increased the volume of legislative activity in Parliament and thereby forced procedural change.

This is clearest as regards private rather than public legislation. The distinction between private and public bills was not always exact, but generally “every bill for the particular interest or benefit of any person or persons” (including local governments) was regarded as private. Such bills had first been widely used in promoting turnpike roads, canals, and the enclosure of commons in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, they were used also to authorize construction of railroads, to regulate local police and sanitation, and to grant private or municipal bodies the authority to undertake the provision of water, gas, tramway services, and so forth.

Due primarily to the flood of railway bills that Parliament had to process in the 1830s and 1840s, the procedure on private bills underwent a complete transformation, especially as regards the role played by locally interested MPs. In the eighteenth century, the presumption was that locally interested members would take the lead. Thus, for example, a bill to enclose commons in Lincolnshire would typically be introduced by an

Introduction

MP for Lincolnshire, who would then steer the bill through Parliament. The crucial stage was generally in committee, and in the appointment of this committee the eighteenth century solicitude for the locally interested MP was particularly clear: as a general rule, all MPs whose constituencies were in, or adjacent to, the area affected by the bill were put on the committee. Often, only those MPs who were locally concerned would attend committee meetings, and the result was an informal decentralization of decision-making power (Williams 1948, vol. i).

This informal decentralization can be illustrated in the case of enclosures. There was a general understanding that a petition for enclosure had a chance to pass only if the local landowners in favor of it held between them a three-quarters or four-fifths majority of the land *in value*. If this condition was met, the enclosure usually passed, unless the opposition included some large landowner with influence in Parliament. The proponents of the bill secured the assistance of a local MP, and usually only local MPs paid any attention to the bill as it passed through the House (Tate 1967: 96–100).

Although the old private bill procedure could be an effective way to decentralize decisions when there was no controversy at the local level, it was an entirely different matter when there was disagreement. If both sides to a controversy had effective parliamentary representation, the eighteenth century procedure could be exceedingly cumbersome and costly. The cost came chiefly in committee, where the proceedings were patterned after a court of law, both sides being represented by counsel. As an eighteenth century manual on private bill procedure warned, litigation in committee “may probably be very tedious, especially if the parties have money enough to throw away in feeing counsel” (Williams 1948, vol. i: 33).

As the nineteenth century progressed, more and more money was thrown away enriching counsel. The chief reason for this was the increase in the number of private bills dealing with controversial matters. Bills to naturalize a wealthy foreigner or to remove entail from an estate were rarely contested. Bills to give right of way to a new railway were often contested. After a variety of partial remedies had been applied, the railway boom of the 1840s destroyed the old procedure. In 1844, 45% of all petitions for private bills pertained to railways; and in the same year the Commons decided to staff their railway bill committees exclusively with impartial members. This practice was extended to all other private bills in 1855. Each member chosen for committee service thereafter was required to sign a declaration that his constituents had no local interest, and that he had no personal interest in the bill to be considered (Williams 1948, vol. i; May 1851: 529).

Although by far the greater part of the legislative activity stimulated

The historical setting

by the growth of the railroad was private, not all was. During the 1840s, Parliament passed several public acts that directly regulated the conduct of railway companies. Obviously these acts would not even have appeared on the parliamentary agenda, much less been passed, had railroads not been invented. The same might be said regarding factory acts and the invention of factories, acts protecting power looms from vandalism and the invention of power looms, and so forth. In general, invention, structural change in the economy, and the explosion and redistribution of population all generated new problems that eventually worked their way into the legislative process. As a consequence, the public business of Parliament expanded: where the *Parliamentary Debates* took 4,638 pages in 1820, they took 6,944 in 1840, and 10,786 in 1860. As in the arena of private legislation, this increased volume of activity forced changes in the traditional rules of procedure. Of this we shall have more to say in Chapter 6.

In addition to illustrating the growing activity of Parliament, railroad legislation in the 1840s also shows the expanding involvement of business firms in the political process. Gladstone's bill in 1844 can be taken as an example. As originally proposed, the bill specified conditions under which new railroad companies might, after a period of fifteen years, be purchased by the state. The railway companies viewed the possibility of nationalization with great hostility, and in July of 1844 a deputation with representatives from twenty-nine of the largest railway companies met with Peel, Gladstone, and Lord Granville Somerset to urge their views. After the government refused to postpone the measure, the railroads took the battle into the press and also intensively lobbied individual MPs. Eventually, Gladstone was forced to compromise: of the original bill's forty-eight clauses, half were abandoned, and the clauses touching on state purchase were made considerably more favorable to the companies (Alderman 1973: 16–17).

Although not all industries had as potent an influence in Parliament as did the railroads, the attempt to affect the political process seems to have been increasingly common. Consider, for example, the growth of local Chambers of Commerce. The first British Chambers of Commerce were established in New York and Jersey in 1768. In the British Isles, early Chambers were established at Glasgow and Belfast (1783), at Edinburgh (1785), and at Manchester (1794) (Alderman 1984: 7). For the most part, according to Read (1964), these early Chambers of Commerce had limited success: provincial businessmen in general seemed more disposed to join ad hoc groups that lobbied for specific laws than to support the more permanent and general lobbying efforts offered by the Chambers. From about mid-century, however, more and more Chambers were founded or refounded: at Liverpool (1850), Bradford (1851), Leeds

Introduction

(1851), Birmingham (1855), Sheffield (1857), Nottingham (1860), and in many other places. In 1860 many of the Chambers joined together to found the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. The Association opened a London office and retained an agent who was, among other things, charged with obtaining early notice of all parliamentary bills affecting commerce and with arranging interviews with MPs (Read 1964: 210–11).

In addition to business associations, the nineteenth century also saw the growth of specialized organizations dedicated to specific political objectives. Of these we shall have more to say in Chapter 7; for present purposes it is sufficient to note that such groups were rare until the first Reform Act made the achievement of legislative goals through an electoral strategy more workable, and the success of the Anti-Corn Law League in implementing such a strategy in the 1840s sparked widespread imitation.

PART II

The development of disciplined parliamentary parties

3

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

Historians have referred to the period between the first and second Reform Acts as the “golden age of the private MP.” Although this phrase would certainly be a misleading guide to the private member’s procedural status, which declined significantly in this period (see Chapter 6), it does convey some idea of the prestige which the private member enjoyed. This prestige was based in part on a conception of the member of Parliament as an independent and significant agent in the “grand inquest of the nation.” Parliamentary independence was in vogue, especially after the Peelites broke off from the Conservatives in 1846: “If there was one attitude that the Peelites popularized and made fashionable, it was that even the most mute backbencher, when it came to a division, had a duty to vote his conscience and his sense of honor” (Jones and Erickson 1972: 222–23). In keeping with this attitude, many MPs emphasized in their election addresses that they would take an “independent” stance in the Commons, or give “independent support to Liberal (or Conservative) principles.” And, in Parliament, party discipline reached its lowest measured levels in the twenty years after the repeal of the Corn Laws.

It is the marked increase in levels of discipline after this mid-century nadir that has attracted the attention of journalists and scholars since the 1870s. Precise measurement of the increase in discipline has lagged behind recognition, however, and is still very incomplete for the period before 1885. Since we shall often be dealing with questions of timing, and attempting to delimit the periods to which various explanations of the increase in discipline can feasibly apply, we need to take a close look at what quantitative knowledge there is of trends in party discipline in the nineteenth century.

THE MEASUREMENT OF COHESION

The earliest published figures on aggregate party discipline are due to A. L. Lowell’s pioneering work at the turn of the century (Lowell 1902). In

Development of parliamentary parties

this work, Lowell defined the now-familiar concept of a “party vote” – one in which 90% or more of the members of one major party oppose 90% or more of the other major party – and used it to document the upsurge in discipline by calculating the percentage of all divisions which were party votes in seven selected years: 1836, 1850, 1860, 1871, 1881, 1894, and 1899. Since Lowell’s work, only two comparable contributions to our quantitative knowledge of party cohesion in Victorian Parliaments have been made.¹ Hugh Berrington has calculated the percentage of divisions which were party votes in 1883, 1890, and 1903 (Berrington 1967–68), and John D. Fair has recently calculated alternative statistics of cohesion for every year from 1885 to 1918 (Fair 1983). Data compiled for this book allow estimation of the levels of discipline in 1869 and 1875.

Before presenting any of these figures, we should first note that the significance of intra-party unity on a set of divisions depends on the context in which those divisions are conducted: whether there is salient inter-party conflict, whether the division is whipped, whether the division is well-attended. The premises here are as follows: (1) High levels of unity on questions that provoke little inter-party conflict do not testify to the strength of party as a determinant of the vote as much as would the same levels of unity on conflictual issues. (2) Intra-party unity on unwhipped divisions indicates less about the efficacy of leadership pressure on the membership than does the same level of unity on whipped votes. (3) Simple averages may mislead: The procedure of previous scholars (not just in the British field) has been to calculate simple averages, adding up the cohesion scores on each division and dividing this sum by the number of divisions. By this procedure, a division in which only 10 members of the party participated, 3 dissenting, counts equally as a division in which 300 participated, 90 dissenting. Ninety instances of dissidence in the latter division contribute no more to the final statistic than do the 3 dissents of the first division. If most dissidence occurs at unimportant and sparsely attended divisions, then we may underestimate the real influence of party by reporting averages of cohesion coefficients, without weighting divisions by their attendance.²

In order for us to take account of these three factors – inter-party conflict, whipping, and attendance – Tables 3.1–3.5 provide a broad

¹Other significant contributions have been made by a number of scholars. W. O. Aydelotte, John R. Bylsma, and James C. Hamilton use scalogram techniques on large samples of divisions. See Aydelotte (1962–63), Bylsma (1977), and Hamilton (1968). Beales (1967), Mitchell (1967), and others have intensively examined much smaller samples. Stephens and Brady (1976) look at cohesion in large divisions. Beer (1966) gives original figures for Edwardian Parliaments.

²The discussion in this paragraph is influenced by Cooper, Brady, and Hurley (1977).

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

Table 3.1. *Intra-party unity: cohesion, simple averages*

Year	Conservatives			Liberals		
	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) IU ^a	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) IU
1836	.739	.795	.762	.619	.659	.706
1850a	.566	.582	.567	.601	.594	.691
1850b	.652	.679	.686	.639	.646	.724
1860	.572	.580	.547	.597	.587	.673
1869	.589	.532	.553	.659	.612	.829
1871	.762	.767	.792	.717	.741	.793
1875	.931	.957	.971	.652	.657	.725
1881	.829	.879		.820	.832	

Note: In Tables 3.1–3.5, the figures for 1836, 1850, 1860, and 1871 are the author's calculations, using the data published by Lowell (1902). The first line for 1850 (labeled 1850a) defines a Conservative as a Protectionist or Peelite, a Liberal as a Liberal, Radical, or Repeater; the second line (labeled 1850b) defines the parties as Lowell did. When there is only one line for 1850, it defines the parties in the more inclusive fashion (i.e., as the lines labeled 1850a do). The figures for 1869 and 1875 are based on 10% random samples drawn by the author from the House of Commons Division Lists. The figures for the 1874–80 Parliament are based on the sample drawn by Hamilton (1968). The figures for 1881 are calculations by Samuel Beer based on Lowell's published data for that year (Beer 1966: 257). All figures exclude divisions in which nine-tenths or more of both parties (defined as the members of the party voting in the division) were on the same side, except for Table 3.5, where we have been unable to find anything but the total figures in 1881, 1894, and 1889.

^aIU = index of unity, i.e., cohesion calculated on the basis of divisions in which 50% or more of one party opposed 50% or more of the other.

Table 3.2. *Intra-party unity: cohesion, weighted averages^a*

Year	Conservatives			Liberals		
	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) IU	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) IU
1836	.770	.823	.796	.602	.642	.692
1850	.588	.602	.589	.620	.627	.704
1860	.608	.599	.614	.622	.618	.704
1869	.712	.716	.715	.749	.699	.851
1871	.817	.828	.840	.744	.771	.816
1875	.941	.965	.977	.676	.687	.742

^a See footnotes to Table 3.1.

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 3.3. *Intra-party unity: cohesion on unwhipped votes^a*

Year	Conservatives		Liberals	
	(1) Simple average	(2) Weighted average	(3) Simple average	(4) Weighted average
1836	.687	.712	.582	.554
1850	.531	.559	.617	.600
1860	.557	.627	.617	.633
1871	.738	.767	.614	.601
1881	.236		.678	
1894	.591		.602	
1899	.673		.982	

^a See footnotes to Table 3.1.

Table 3.4. *Inter-party differences: index of likeness, simple averages^a*

Year	(1) All	(2) Whip	(3) Unwhipped
1836	.447	.378	.513
1850	.566	.564	.572
1860	.606	.620	.577
1869	.465	.515	
1871	.352	.342	.395
1875	.352	.339	

^a See footnotes to Table 3.1.

Table 3.5. *Numbers and percentages of whipped divisions^a*

Year	All	Whip	Governing party
1836	181	88 (48.6%)	Liberals
1850	318	216 (67.9%)	Liberals
1860	257	173 (67.3%)	Liberals
1869	16	11 (68.8%)	Liberals
1871	256	209 (81.6%)	Liberals
1875	26	24 (92.3%)	Conservatives
1881	411	379 (92.2%)	Liberals
1894	246	222 (90.2%)	Liberals
1899	357	316 (88.5%)	Conservatives

^a See footnotes to Table 3.1.

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

array of measures. First, to maintain some comparability with previous studies, we present unweighted average Rice coefficients of cohesion for all and for whipped divisions (Table 3.1). A frequently used statistic in studies of the American Congress combines some elements of the intra-party unity and inter-party conflict dimensions by computing cohesion based only on divisions which saw 50% or more of one party opposed to 50% or more of the other; we present this so-called index of unity in Table 3.1 also. Second, weighted averages are calculated for the various classes of divisions – all, whipped, and those in which majorities of the two parties were opposed (Table 3.2). Third, cohesion on unwhipped votes is described (Table 3.3). Finally, to complement these figures on intra-party unity, information is presented on inter-party conflict (Table 3.4) and on the percentages of divisions which were whipped (Table 3.5).

We will make no attempt to digest the mass of figures in these tables all at once. A few general observations can be made, however. First, as the internal cohesion of the parties increased, their similarity to each other (measured by Rice's index of likeness) declined. We have calculated the index of likeness only through the 1870s, but even for this subset of years a broad negative covariance with cohesion is visible.

Second, cohesion increased markedly within the category of whipped votes, starting in the late 1860s and 1870s. Thus, although it is true (see Table 3.5) that the percentage of votes that were whipped increased in the 1870s, this does not in itself explain the trends in cohesion.

Third, there is no trend observable in the unwhipped figures (Table 3.3) for either party over the century as a whole. Indeed, the figures appear quite erratic, especially for the Conservatives. This is no doubt due in part to the fact that only 10–20% of the divisions were unwhipped by the 1870s, and only 10% thereafter. With a small sample of bills introduced by a motley crew of backbenchers (bills introduced by the government were whipped), it is not surprising to find widely varying figures. This observation warns one against the procedure, which might at first have appeared attractive, of simply comparing whipped to unwhipped cohesion in order to gauge the power of the whip. Even in the earlier years, when a significant number of divisions were unwhipped, there is still the question of why. The government had a decision to make – to whip or not – and little is known about how they decided. On some unwhipped votes, the government may have had a known preference but decided (because they anticipated defiance of the whip? because they had not introduced the bill?) not to whip. In these cases there may still have been pressures on members to support their leaders, and to compare whipped to unwhipped votes in hopes of controlling for these pressures may be misleading. We shall follow the usual procedure in the literature and concentrate for the most part on whipped votes.

Development of parliamentary parties

A fourth point to note is that the weighted averages are generally higher than the simple averages, showing that dissidence was less frequent in the larger divisions, as the work of Beales (1967), Stephens and Brady (1976), and Bylsma (1977) would indicate. Nonetheless, roughly the same pattern appears in both the weighted and unweighted numbers.

This pattern can be described as follows (using the weighted figures when available; see Table 3.2): For the Conservatives, there is a sharp decline from .823 in 1836 to .602 in 1850; a plateau in the 1850s; and a sharp recovery to .716, .828, and .965 in 1869, 1871, and 1875, respectively. A larger sample of divisions drawn from the entire Parliament of 1874–80 indicates that the Conservatives compiled a party voting record in this Parliament comparable to the most disciplined in the century.³ Although cohesion dipped in the early 1880s, the work of Fair (1983) shows that after 1885 Conservative cohesion was almost invariably in the .90s. For the Liberals, there is a much smaller decline, from .642 in 1836 to .618 in 1860, followed by an erratic increase to .699, .771, .687, and .832 in 1869, 1871, 1875, and 1881, respectively. Although Liberal discipline seems to have been incredibly low in 1886, in the later 1880s and 1890s it was generally in the .80s, falling into the .70s only four times. After the turn of the century (and before the Great War) Liberal cohesion was almost invariably in the .90s.

There are a number of questions about the development of party discipline that one might ask. Here we shall focus on explaining the earliest observable increases in cohesion – in the period 1860–81. The contrast between the 1850s and 1870s – especially marked for the Conservative

³The total sample from the 1874–80 Parliament numbers 74, roughly 5% of the divisions in that Parliament. Of these, 26 were a random sample drawn by the author from 1875. Since this subsample was random, we can construct 95% confidence intervals for the 1875 figures. The results are quite reassuring. For example, the 95% confidence interval for the simple average Conservative cohesion score on all sample divisions is (.923, .939). That is, the probability that the true average Conservative cohesion in 1875 was between .923 and .939 is .95. Thus we are confident that the figures for the Conservatives in 1875 do not significantly overstate the level of Conservative discipline in that year. The reliability of the figures for the whole Parliament cannot technically be justified in the same manner, since the full sample is not random. However, further evidence that the levels of discipline in this Parliament were quite high can be culled from the figures on (1) the number of amendments carried against the Government and (2) the number of times the Government whips were defeated. The average number of amendments per year carried against the second Disraeli ministry was .17, lower than the corresponding figure for any other ministry between 1853 and 1905 (these being the cutoff years for the data series on which we base this assertion; see Lowell 1912, vol. i: 317). Similarly, the average number of defeats on whipped divisions per session of the Disraeli ministry was 1.1, a record bettered by only one other ministry (Salisbury's, 1895–1900) from 1857 to 1900. Other indications of the importance of party in this Parliament are given in Hamilton (1968).

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

party but visible for the Liberals as well – reflects, we shall argue, some fundamental changes in the Victorian polity.

THE DETERMINANTS OF PARTY DISCIPLINE

Before discussing its determinants, we should first clarify the meaning of “party discipline” as used here. There is a distinction between “party discipline” construed as the actual disciplinary actions taken by the leadership, and “party discipline” construed as how united a party was in the division lobbies. When interest centers on disciplinary action, it is natural to concentrate on the rewards and punishments available to leaders and their effectiveness in using them. When the explanandum is a particular statistic measuring the frequency with which members of a party voted together, however, any factor that influenced MPs’ voting decisions becomes relevant. We shall use “party discipline” (and “party cohesion,” “party voting unity,” etc.) in the latter sense: to refer to specific statistics measuring the tendency of members of a party to vote together.

With the advent of the computer, the study of such statistics, and other statistics relating to roll call voting, has become a major sub-field of political science and, at least in the United States, of political history.⁴ A variety of approaches to interpreting these statistics – relating them to the underlying political reality which generated them – have been developed. Here we shall discuss two general classes of theories: perfect information models and cue-taking models.

Perfect information models focus on the public nature of legislative voting and attempt to identify those agents in a representative’s environment – e.g., pressure groups, parties, constituents, colleagues – that have the most impact on the legislator’s decisions. As the name suggests, these models tend not to focus on imperfections in the representative’s knowledge, but rather on a variety of straightforward or subtle pressures put on him: the party leadership will not advance his career if he does not support their programme, a pressure group will contribute to his campaign if he votes in such and such a way, his prospective opponent at the next election will advertise his vote on a particular issue among his constituents, and so on. Cue taking models, in contrast, focus on the vast number and complexity of decisions that modern legislators must make and on the way in which the informational requirements thereby imposed on them are lessened. While these models are not incompatible with the main aspects of the perfect information models, their central insight is rather different.

⁴For the political science literature, see, for example, Fiorina (1974) and Kingdon (1977). For a survey of recent work in political history, see Silbey (1981).

Development of parliamentary parties

Both the perfect information and the cue-taking approaches are applicable to the nineteenth century English case. We shall first consider the perfect information approach.

As he cast his vote, the nineteenth century MP could not simply weigh the questions of public policy *in vacuo*. He had also, perhaps, to deal with explicit communications and requests from active and articulate interest groups, to anticipate the responses of less articulate constituent groups, or to gauge the interpersonal consequences of his action in a collegial and partisan body. He was subject, in other words, to a variety of pressures.

Pressure, as we shall use the term, refers to the perception by an MP that some person's or group's future behavior was to some degree contingent upon his vote, and that this behavior would affect his well-being. Some kinds of pressure were rather like an explicit barter concluded between the MP and the various groups which populated his environment: the MP would vote so as to further the group's goals if the group would further, or refrain from hindering, the MP's goals (over some of which it presumably had some control). Thus, for example, Lowell (1912: 467–68) notes that socially conscious Conservative backbenchers were aware that they might forfeit invitations to events at the Foreign Office if they did not consistently support the party in the division lobbies. Mid-Victorian pressure groups, as discussed in Chapter 7, were firmly wedded to a strategy of electoral pressure, seeking to convince MPs that they faced electoral defeat if they supported "the drunkard's drink," business on Sundays, or any of a number of other pernicious practices.

The meaning of "pressure" as we use it here is broader than the colloquial or "barter" meaning, however. In common parlance one generally speaks of a legislator being pressured only when he faces a clear threat from some group. As used here, pressure can exist without such threats. For example, an MP had sometimes to be sensitive to the desires of his constituents, even if these were in no way expressed at the time of a particular division, for he knew that his vote might be raised and scrutinized at the next election.

Given this broad notion of pressure, we can consider two basic ways in which party discipline can increase. For specificity, we shall focus on individual party support scores, which report the frequency with which a given MP voted with a majority of his party, relative to the total number of times he voted.⁵

⁵Note that we use frequency of agreement with the majority position of the party membership, rather than frequency of agreement with the position of the party leadership, as the numerator. Conceptually, the latter is perhaps preferable. However, practically speaking, the position of the party leadership (given by the whips) and the majority position of the voting membership were almost always the same, even in the earlier part of the century.

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

First, it is clear that the relative frequency with which an MP voted with his party should, other things equal, have increased as the party leadership was more able to affect the goals of MPs. Indeed, this idea drives most thinking about party discipline. In explaining the decline of discipline after the Conservative split over the Corn Laws, the loss of credibility of the leadership as a source both of patronage and of sanctions has been cited as important (Chapter 4). For Ostrogorski, the key to the increase in discipline after the second Reform Act was electoral pressure exerted by the new local party associations (Chapter 5). The high levels of cohesion in the twentieth century House of Commons have often been attributed in part to the control which the Premier has over the career advancement of MPs (Chapter 7), and to the government's ability to use the threat of resignation or dissolution to keep its partisan and election-shy supporters in hand (Chapter 8). One of the major behavioral developments in the nineteenth century, the focusing of electoral attention on the Cabinet rather than on the individual candidates for MP (Chapter 9), meant that electoral pressure from the constituencies was largely redirected from the individual MP to his party leaders, so that party pressures bulked relatively larger in the decisions of many MPs (Chapter 11).

Second, the frequency with which an MP supported his party should, other things equal, have increased as the party's position was less often repugnant to other groups and to the MP himself. This effect is independent of the "strength" of party; even if the party had virtually no ability to affect any of the MP's goals, if it happened usually to agree with the forces which determined the MP's decisions, then of course the MP would be observed usually to support his party. A number of hypotheses are suggested by this observation. First, any process or occurrence (perhaps a redistricting, an extension of the franchise, a propaganda campaign) that increased the frequency of agreement of a party with the constituencies of its members should have promoted cohesion. This idea is common in the American literature, where the strength of constituent groups makes it particularly appealing, but has received only limited attention in the British literature.⁶ Second, any process (e.g., the regularization of nomination procedures, an ideological polarization in the country coincident with party lines) which increased the probability that a party's membership would agree personally with the party program should have fostered voting unity. Third, if we consider the decisions which MPs would have made in the absence of any party pressure (but reflecting all other pressures), any process bringing these decisions more into accord with the party position should have increased cohesion. An

⁶In the American literature, see, for example, Cooper, Brady, and Hurley (1977). For a constituency-based look at the British parties, see Stephens and Brady (1976).

Development of parliamentary parties

example of such a process has been suggested by Berrington (1967–68). According to Berrington, the inability of the party leadership to rely on support from the opposite benches after the early 1880s necessitated the negotiation of greater intra-party unity; this process of intra-party negotiation ensured that actually proposed legislation was more likely to be palatable to concerned members of the party. If anything, Berrington seems to argue that the party leadership became weaker, yet was able to secure a higher level of specifically partisan support because of an increased probability of agreement with their followers.⁷ In Chapter 11, we discuss the regularization of nomination procedures and the increasing willingness of party members to negotiate their differences, rather than carry them into the division lobbies, in greater detail.

An implicit assumption of the simplest perfect information models is that legislators know the preferences of relevant groups, and their own preferences, regarding any particular bill. Modern legislators, however, vote on a great variety of motions dealing with matters sometimes arcane and often complex, and recent scholarship has emphasized the degree to which legislators, especially in the American Congress, remain ignorant of the details and even the main outlines of many motions on which they vote, relying on cues or recommendations given by colleagues and leaders in deciding how to vote.⁸ According to one school of thought, this represents an economizing response of legislators in the face of the vast amount of information they would have to process were they to become “fully informed.”⁹ If cues are appropriately chosen, decisions can be made as the legislator would have made them were he to bear the costs of becoming fully informed, but these costs are avoided.

There are conditions under which cue-taking is more likely, and others under which it is less likely, however, as the seminal work of Anthony Downs (1957) makes clear. Downs's work actually focuses on voting behavior in the mass electorate, but since his analysis can be applied to legislative voting as well, a brief summary is in order. A fundamental distinction that Downs makes is between political information which is essentially free and that which is not. Free information is that for which no cost is borne that could be transferred to another person – as nearly

⁷Since the dissatisfaction that a party member expressed in the “negotiation period” may have reflected not just his personal preferences but also pressure from constituent and other groups, Berrington's hypothesis in a sense combines the first two hypotheses. For another work emphasizing the importance of intra-party bargaining and accommodation, see Jackson (1968).

⁸On cue-taking, see Matthews and Stimson (1970; 1975).

⁹Actually the notion of a rationally selected cue, while evident to some extent in the work of Matthews and Stimson (1970; 1975), appears more obviously in related work on the notion of party identification. For a recent review and assessment of the rationality of party cues in the electorate, see Franklin (1984).

The measurement and theory of party cohesion

as possible only the irreducible cost of cognizing or assimilating the information is borne by the individual. Thus, for example, a broadsheet handed to a voter free of charge as he walks down the street may represent free information in Downs's sense: the only cost is that of reading and understanding the proffered essay. Of course, if the voter is illiterate or the essay poorly written, then some of the costs of the information could in principle be transferred to another – one who would read the broadsheet and provide a clear verbal summary. Probably the most significant sources of free political information in nineteenth century English society were conversations, cartoons, posters, songs, broadsheets, and newspapers. The question Downs asks is when rational voters (of the species *Homo economicus*) will invest in costly political information, and when they will rely on the flow of free information available in their society. At the most abstract level, the answer is simple. Rational voters are more likely to rely on essentially free information when (1) it is more costly to become informed and (2) the expected benefits of becoming informed are less.

Applying this general perspective to the nineteenth century Parliament, the following specific hypotheses are suggested: (1) Since the cost of becoming informed increases with the complexity and frequency of votes, nineteenth century MPs should have been more likely to rely on free information – a chief element of which was the recommendations of their party leaders – as motions pushed to a division became more complex and frequent. In Chapter 6 these ideas are examined further when it is shown that both the number and complexity of divisions, and the attendance rates of MPs, increased over time. (2) Since the benefit to acquiring information depends on the chances that the information will actually *change* the vote decision, any process whereby nineteenth century MPs became more confident that their party's line would be acceptable to them were they to investigate the matter thoroughly should have increased party voting. This logic leads again to the hypothesis, discussed earlier, that party cohesion should have increased when the probability of agreement between the party and other relevant groups (or the MP) increased. These ideas will be examined further in Chapters 10 and 11.

4

The Peelites and the disruption of the party system

The preceding chapter has shown quite clearly that party discipline in the House of Commons increased from the 1850s to the 1870s. This chapter asks if an explanation for this increase can be found by examining the prior decline in discipline, from 1836 to the 1850s. This decline is generally attributed to the controversy over the Corn Laws and the resulting break-up of the Conservative party.¹ If this explanation is correct, one might expect that when the split in Conservative ranks had been resolved, discipline would recover. Hence, some portion of the post-1850 increase might be accounted for by a simple recovery or rebound theory. Because Liberal cohesion was almost constant over the 1836–60 period, falling only slightly, notions of recovery are not attractive as an explanation for the increase in Liberal discipline over the 1860–81 period, which appears to be a first-time phenomenon. But trends in Conservative discipline (Tables 3.1–3.2) show a considerable dip from 1836 to 1850 and 1860, and “recovery” may be an apt explanation of the trend from 1860 to 1871. In order to assess this idea, we must first briefly examine what the effects of the split in Conservative ranks were, and when these effects began and ended.

The schism in the Conservative party came in the Parliament of 1841–47 when Sir Robert Peel, then Conservative leader, introduced and passed a bill repealing the Corn Laws (with the aid of the Whigs). After the decisive vote in 1846 the bulk of the Conservative party, referred to as Protectionists, acquired new leaders (among them, Disraeli), and refused to follow Peel further; a somewhat smaller band, referred to as Peelites or Liberal-Conservatives and including many prominent men (among them, Gladstone), continued allegiance to Peel. Although the break was acrimonious and sharp, the possibilities for reconciliation between at

¹This is the position taken in Lowell (1902). See also Jones and Erickson (1972).

Peelites and disruption of the party system

least the majority of Protectionists and Peelites remained. The prestige of the Peelite leadership was such that the possibility also existed that they would forge a new party, drawing additional support from both the Protectionists and the Liberals. And, finally, union with the Liberals could not be discounted.²

This uncertain status of the Peelite section, with the possibility that they might pivot to either party or form a new party, acted to erode the foundations of party discipline. First, the Peelite leadership contained a number of Cabinet-level talents, and any Premier – Protectionist or Liberal – bidding for their support had naturally to allocate several ministerial positions to them. But this meant that those who conducted the day-to-day party battle for the Protectionists and Liberals “found themselves (with good reason) wondering whether . . . their services would be rewarded once the prize of office had been attained” (Jones and Erickson 1972: 222) or whether the position that might have been theirs would go to a Peelite. Thus, the Peelite position exerted a demoralizing influence on the leadership in both major parties. Second, as an alternative set of leaders, the Peelites represented an alternative source of patronage. Disappointed Liberal or Protectionist office-seekers, who might not be able to see their way over to the other major party, could appeal to the ideologically more palatable Peelites (Jones and Erickson 1972: 35). Third, ambitious backbenchers in both of the major parties may have had in mind the possibility that the Peelite leaders might appear in their own party in a leadership capacity. This possibility undermined the authority of the regular party leaders, since backbenchers might look to future Peelite leaders for guidance when they disagreed with their nominal leaders. Thus, for example, disobeying Disraeli was not so dangerous if the chance existed that he would be displaced from the Conservative leadership in the Commons by Gladstone.

The state of limbo or potential in which the Peelites stood lasted for approximately a decade. Sir Robert Peel, who died in 1850, made no attempt to resolve the uncertainty. He did not reward his followers and move toward the establishment of a new party; nor did he make overtures either to the Protectionists or to the Liberals. Rather, he allowed his example of disregard for party to stand and emphasized the independence and dignity of the individual MP. After Peel’s death, the Peelite leaders similarly made no decisive move. Throughout the 1850s, however, the Peelite section shrank, its members drifting back into the major parties or retiring, with not enough new recruits to make up the losses. Recent

²Much of this chapter is based on Jones and Erickson (1972) and, to a lesser extent, on Conacher (1972).

Development of parliamentary parties

scholars have suggested 1856 or 1857 as the point at which a meaningful section no longer existed (Jones and Erickson 1972; Conacher 1972).

This date may be a bit early as marking the end of the effects mentioned before. Presumably, the prestige that the Peelite example gave to parliamentary independence did not disappear suddenly. And individual Peelites remained to a later date. In particular, Gladstone did not clearly enter the Liberal party and sever all ties with the Conservatives until he accepted office under Palmerston in 1859 and resigned from the Carlton Club in 1860. Nonetheless, one might expect that the major parties in 1860, well after the supposed end of the Peelite section in 1856–57, should have been less directly influenced by the Peelite episode. A comparison of the levels of cohesion in 1850 with those in 1860 might then provide a very rough means by which to assess the importance of the Peelites' effect on discipline. The expectation is that discipline, if measured comparably in both years, would have been lower in 1850, when the Peelites were much in evidence, than in 1860, after they had passed from the scene as a separate group.

Table 3.1 dispels this expectation. The reader will note that there are two sets of entries for 1850. One set (labeled 1850b in the table) corresponds to Lowell's assumption that the Protectionists and Peelites were properly viewed as separate parties at that time, as were the Liberals and Repealers. Lowell classified all MPs in 1860 as either Conservative or Liberal, and he noted (1902: 327) that the apparent decline in discipline in his figures from 1850, when Protectionists and "true" Liberals are compared, to 1860, when expanded notions of Conservative and Liberal are used, is presumably due to this difference in classification. He opines that the nadir of party voting occurred somewhat earlier than 1860. Yet, if one recalculates cohesion scores in 1850 after grouping Protectionists and Peelites under the Conservative banner and subsuming the Repealers under the Liberal banner – essentially what Lowell does for 1860 – one finds that the new 1850 figures (labeled 1850a in the table) are remarkably similar to the 1860 figures.

This finding may indicate a problem with the rebound theory, if we believe that the disruptive effects of the Peelites on discipline should have been significantly mitigated by 1860. The other alternative is to emphasize the slowness with which the scars of the Peelite schism healed. If we take this latter route, then the timing of the rebound would appear to be about right – the 1860s.

However, there are other factors to consider before accepting the rebound theory as applied to the 1860s. Although it has some appeal, the theory is more complicated than it appears. In order for it to be straightforwardly operative, party discipline must be shown to have been reestablished in the 1860s and 1870s on the same basis as in the 1830s; that

Peelites and disruption of the party system

is, the elements contributing to discipline in the 1830s must somehow have been depressed by the split in Conservative ranks and then re-emerged as this split was resolved. But at least one factor that still played at least a supporting role in maintaining party cohesion in 1836 – namely, political patronage – had changed considerably by the 1870s. The following excerpt of a letter written in 1843 by Thomas Fremantle, Patronage Secretary of the Treasury, to a youthful William Ewart Gladstone, then a member of Peel's Conservative ministry, is indicative of the state of affairs earlier in the century:

I hear that your application in favor of young Mr. Walker is not founded on strong political claims. It is more a case of kindness and charity – such as I should more readily consider than any others if I were at liberty to do so – but at the Treasury we must look first to the claims of our political supporters and our patronage is, as you know, quite inadequate to meet the applications of members of the House of Commons in favor of their constituents who naturally consider all our patronage as theirs.

The son of a good voter at Newark would stand a better chance under your recommendation than the son of a poor clergyman who probably made it a point of duty not to interfere with politics.

If, however, I have misunderstood the case, let me know and I will note the name and pray excuse me for my frankness in explaining to you how these things are viewed within the corrupt walls of a Sec[retary of the] Treasury's room.

(Hanham 1969: 321)³

By the 1870s, the importance of patronage was considerably reduced and clearly on the decline. In 1853, the Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Civil Service, advocating open competitive examination as the means for admission to the Civil Service and a number of other reforms, became the programme for reformers for the rest of the century. In 1855 a preliminary examination designed to exclude the unfit from further consideration was wrung from a reluctant Derby ministry, although it appears to have had limited effect. A more important step was taken in Gladstone's first ministry by an Order in Council of June 1870 which established open competition as the method of entry into the Civil Service. Gladstone's friend and Patronage Secretary, George Glyn, complained of the reform: "I lose, without notice, and at once, the great advantage of the daily correspondence and communication with members of the party which the ordinary dispensing of the Treasury patronage gave me, to say nothing of the power which it placed in my hands" (Hanham 1969: 315). It would seem, then, that a pillar in the edifice of discipline in 1836 had been seriously damaged by 1870, and for reasons not usually linked with the split in Conservative ranks over the Corn Laws. Thus, one may question whether the rebound theory in its simplest form holds water.

³On the importance of patronage generally, see Gash (1977: 345, 356–57, 365).

Development of parliamentary parties

The difficulty in giving an accurate account of the timing of the Peelites' effects and the conceptual problem just discussed make the rebound theory less attractive. It seems plausible that there were some phenomena one might wish to group under the rubric of "recovery," but to talk of a return to the *status quo ante* is misleading. Indeed, the argument of later chapters is that the increase in discipline – among both Conservatives and Liberals – was based upon fundamentally new features of English politics. Finally, it should be noted that even if one accepted some notions of recovery for the Conservatives, these would not account for the levels of discipline in 1875, and in the 1874–80 Parliament generally, which were considerably higher than those in 1836.

5

The caucus

The establishment of local party associations in most constituencies soon after the second Reform Act nearly doubled the electorate, the affiliation of these associations with national umbrella organizations, and the role these new organizations played in disciplining MPs became the subjects of a series of polemical contemporary examinations.¹ W. E. Forster's well-publicized altercation with the Bradford Liberal Association in the 1870s was painted as an intemperate attack by rabid non-conformists on a moderate statesman. The fancied resemblance of the Birmingham plan of organization to American big-city machines, the vigorous activity of the National Liberal Federation in the 1880s, Randolph Churchill's attempt to use the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations as a vehicle for his ambitions – all these made lively topics in the periodical literature and, later, in books. The culmination of this literature was Mosei Ostrogorski's forceful attack at the end of the century on the new forms of British party organization, which put forth a view of this organization – emphasizing its importance in disciplining MPs – that is still widely influential, especially among political scientists.

This chapter examines Ostrogorski's views. The first section reviews the history of extra-parliamentary party organization from an Ostrogorski perspective, then turns to more recent and rather different assessments. The second section focuses specifically on what effect, if any, local party associations had on the party loyalty of MPs.

EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY PARTY ORGANIZATION

Election campaigns before the second Reform Act were still organized in an ad hoc fashion. The candidate hired someone, generally a solicitor, to act as his manager; and electoral machinery – to get voters to the poll,

¹References to this literature can be found in Ostrogorski (1902).

Development of parliamentary parties

organize treating, and so on – was constructed at the candidate's expense or, less often, at that of his friends and benefactors. This handling of election campaigns was feasible because the constituencies were still small (85% had electorates smaller than 2,000) and because there was something of a natural electoral organization in the hierarchical structure of society. It was well known, for example, that landlords greatly influenced the votes of their tenants, and a similar relationship held between employers and their men, between important customers and the shopkeepers to whom they gave their custom, and so on (Gash 1977: ch. 8). This meant that lining up the support of influential men – which required little organization – could do much for a candidate's chances. If a candidate was successful in courting influential support, he needed even less in the way of a "machine."

This state of affairs was altered fundamentally, according to Ostrogorski, by the second Reform Act. The electorate was almost doubled by this Act, and the traditional conduct of elections – by solicitors, influence, and money – became inadequate. Encouraged by the parliamentary leadership on the Conservative side and by the example of the "Birmingham Caucus" on the Liberal, permanent local party associations with dues, officers, regular meetings, "mass" membership, and continual activity sprang up. These were organized at the national level by the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (the NU, founded in 1867) and the National Liberal Federation (the NLF, founded in 1877). Those MPs who sought reelection found that they were now dependent on the new party associations. Ostrogorski argued that because the local and national associations were loyal to the parliamentary leadership, the leadership acquired an effective electoral threat with which to discipline their members:

Now under the Caucus [i.e., the new organizational regime], and thanks to it, in both parties refractory Members are called upon by their respective Associations to fall in behind the leader and they must comply if they want to be reelected. Thus in the intimate relations between the parliamentary chief and his followers, there has been imported from outside a regular intimidation agency, which makes the Members, for the nonce, simple puppets on the parliamentary stage. (Ostrogorski 1902: 609)

The evidence that Ostrogorski gives for this view is anecdotal and pertains largely to the Liberal experience. Much attention is paid to the Birmingham Caucus, an elaborate machinery created to organize the Liberal forces of Birmingham so as to thwart the so-called minority representation clause of the second Reform Act. This clause directed that electors in those few large boroughs returning three members should have only two votes. The caucus arranged a system of ward-by-ward voting so as to split the total Liberal strength equally amongst the three

The caucus

Liberal candidates, ensuring the victory of all three over the greatly out-manned Conservatives, who might otherwise have sneaked in. The Birmingham Caucus appeared at the first general election (1868) after the second Reform Act, and the rapidity and radical nature of this innovation set the tone for much of Ostrogorski's discussion.

The actual content of the other evidence which Ostrogorski advances is indicative of a much less sharp and radical organizational break, however. The following passage from G. Lowes Dickinson, who slightly earlier had come to many of the same conclusions as Ostrogorski, is representative of the other evidence upon which Ostrogorski relies:

To organize simultaneous protests, addressed, at critical points, to members who show signs of a dangerous independence, is one of the recognized functions of the National Liberal Federation. "If the caucus had existed in 1866," says Mr. Schnadhorst in a burst of confidence, "the Cave of Adullam would have been almost untenanted"; and later examples show that the boast was justified. In 1881, for instance, there were signs of wavering in the Liberal ranks on the question of the Irish policy of the government. Instantly, a circular was issued by four officials of the Federation, calling upon the Liberal associations to put pressure on their representatives. "The time has come," they announced, "for Liberal constituencies to declare that proceedings which involve such danger to the nation, and to the Liberal government, cannot be tolerated." "The circular," we are told, "produced the effect which the committee had hoped to secure," and the Liberal government was saved, to save the nation. Similar tactics were adopted with equal success in 1883. (Dickinson 1895: 82–83)

What is noteworthy about this passage is that the examples cited of the Liberal Caucus in action are both from the 1880s. This is characteristic of Ostrogorski's evidence regarding the NLF, also. And this is not surprising, since the NLF was not established until 1877. The point is that one should not look to the caucus's sway to explain the general increase in Liberal discipline from the 1850s to 1869, 1871, and 1875, which is seen most clearly in the weighted averages (Table 3.2). The discipline of members from Birmingham and other constituencies where the organizational change was abrupt may have been affected by such changes,² but most Liberal members do not seem to have faced a vigorous association in the early 1870s. Hanham has noted that, even in the big towns, "almost everywhere the 1868 election was fought on an ad hoc basis by an organization specially formed or adapted for the purpose by the old party leaders" (Hanham 1978: 93) and that, further, "the overwhelming success of the Liberals at the 1868 election encouraged them to rest content with their existing organization" (Hanham 1978: 114). James Bryce observed that "as late as the general elections of 1868 and 1874, nearly all candidates offered themselves [directly] to the constit-

²Joseph Chamberlain's defection does not fit well with such a supposition, however.

Development of parliamentary parties

uency," rather than as the nominees of a local association, as became customary later (Bryce 1913, vol. ii: 81). It appears that, on the Liberal side of the House, increased discipline due to the spread of local associations under the NLF could not possibly have been significant until the later 1870s at the earliest.

Moreover, later scholarship indicates that the establishment of a local association did not necessarily mean added pressure on the MP to toe the party line. First, the local association may have been impotent. Consider, for example, the North Northamptonshire Liberal Association's "decidedly subordinate" role in the 1880 election: "The Association remained the client of the Whig landowners because, as its President acknowledged, 'there was no possibility of their gaining a success unless they obtained a candidate from one of the aristocratic families in the county.' The decision that Robert Spencer should contest the North division [in 1880] was made quite independently by Lord Spencer, and the Association was not informed of it until after the dissolution" (Howarth 1969: 88–89). Second, the local party may have been independently minded. In East Northamptonshire, the Liberal MP found himself drawn away from the mainstream of his party by the radical activity in his local association (Howarth 1969: 114–15). Berrington (1967–68: 363) has asserted that this was common, and that "the Liberal Caucus, at least in the early stages, made for more, not less indiscipline."

The effect of Liberal associations established after the second Reform Act on Liberal discipline in Parliament has not yet been addressed statistically. Those who stress the importance of these associations, such as Ostrogorski and Dickinson, cite instances of successful pressuring by the NLF of potentially dissident MPs. Later scholars cite examples showing that local associations sometimes fostered rather than inhibited dissidence. What is needed to advance this dispute is constituency-by-constituency knowledge of the status of Liberal organization together with information on the tendency to dissent of each Liberal MP. One could then see whether MPs with well organized districts were more or less supportive of party positions than MPs with poorly organized districts. Also, the increase in discipline in those districts acquiring the new organization could be compared to the increase in districts with no organizational improvement. While this programme of research is not feasible for the Liberals, it is for the Conservatives, and is attempted in the next section.

PARTY ORGANIZATION AND PARTY DISCIPLINE: THE CONSERVATIVES

The development of local Conservative associations and the influence of this development on Conservative discipline received, as noted above,

The caucus

less attention from Ostrogorski and other critics of party organization. Partly, this seems to be because the NU did not pressure MPs in the open fashion of the NLF. One early observer noted that “the local Conservative committees were jealous of outside control, and would not surrender their independence; the NU has consequently become more than anything else a centre for distributing pamphlets, cartoons and other electioneering literature” (Hanham 1978: 115). Although the NU did not overtly suppress dissidence, it should be noted that the Conservatives, the losers in 1868, made a determined effort to improve their organization. An aggressive new party agent, who set about to prod local Conservatives into achieving a basic level of organization, was appointed in 1870, and by 1874 59% of all English and Welsh constituencies had self-styled “Conservative” or “Conservative Workingmen’s” associations. Possibly, this fairly rapid development of local associations made for an increase in discipline on the Conservative side of the House. If we do not entertain this supposition, which essentially extends Ostrogorski’s explanation to a time and party which he did not originally emphasize, then there is certainly a need to explain the markedly higher levels of Conservative discipline in the 1870s on some other grounds than extra-parliamentary organization.

In order to probe the connection between Conservative organization and discipline, use is made of a document compiled in 1874 by the Conservative Central Office describing the state of local Conservative organization in each of the 293 constituencies of England and Wales in that year.³ In addition to noting the existence of clubs, registration associations, Conservative or Conservative Workingmen’s associations, and variants on these forms, the document gives the names and addresses of relevant officers and agents. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, 59% of the English and Welsh constituencies were identified as having some kind of a Conservative association. Another 9% had either a registration association or a club as the most significant organization, while 29% had only a local party agent and 3% had no organization whatsoever. The relatively fine organizational categorization appearing in the source document is collapsed in Table 5.1, which compares, in counties and in boroughs, the average party support score of Conservative MPs from districts with a Conservative or Conservative Workingmen’s association to the average score of MPs from districts that had no organization or only an agent.⁴ As can be seen, there is no support in this

³This document, titled “Conservative Agents and Associations in the Counties and Boroughs of England and Wales,” was first used by Hanham (1978). Professor Hanham was kind enough to provide me with a reproduction of his own hand copy of the document after efforts to secure a copy from England failed.

⁴In this and the succeeding analysis, party support is defined as the percentage of

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 5.1. Conservative discipline as a function of Conservative organization

Party support	Organizational status	
	Low	High
<i>The boroughs</i>		
Average party support score	.941	.943
Number of observations	46	74
<i>t</i> test	<i>t</i> = .12	
<i>The counties</i>		
Average party support score	.976	.965
Number of observations	88	50
<i>t</i> test	<i>t</i> = 1.47	

Note: The party support score is defined as the proportion of times a Conservative MP supported his government when they put on the whips.

Source: See footnote 4.

table for the idea that Conservative organization affected Conservative discipline. In the boroughs, there was virtually no difference in average loyalty of MPs between well-organized and poorly organized districts, while in the counties, those from the poorly organized districts actually gave higher levels of support than those from organized places (although the difference is not significant).

Although there is no support for the Ostrogorski hypothesis in these data, the approach might be criticized as not testing the theory in its own terms. What is relevant to Ostrogorski's theory is not, directly, the average levels of party support found in organized and unorganized places, but rather the change in discipline found in those places which acquired a new party organization as contrasted with those places which clung to the older forms. This comparison is more difficult but is attempted in Table 5.2. Using a sample of divisions from 1869-70, we have computed party support scores for all those Conservative MPs who attended at least one division in the sample. The levels of discipline in 1869-70 should be less affected by the Conservative organizational push, which, as mentioned above, really got under way with the appointment of a new na-

divisions whipped by the Conservative government on which the MP supported the government position. The divisions used to calculate the party support were drawn from two sources: first, a random sample of 26 divisions in 1875 drawn by the author; second, a sample of 19 divisions in 1874 and 1875 drawn by James C. Hamilton (Hamilton 1968). An overlap of two meant that the total sample was 43. If a larger sample of divisions is used by including 31 divisions from the later years of the 1874-80 Parliament, the findings are not altered. Nor are the findings altered if the comparison is made between constituencies with and without Conservative associations.

The caucus

Table 5.2. *Changes in Conservative discipline and organization*

	Organizational status in 1874	
	Low	High
Average change in party support	.063 (89)	.056 (65)

Note: Party support scores in 1869–70 were calculated based on a sample of 30 divisions: 16 randomly sampled from 1869 by the author, 14 coded by Davis and Huttenback (1986). Support scores in 1874–75 were calculated based on the sample of 43 divisions described in footnote 4.

tional party agent in 1870. Hence, a comparison of the change in discipline from 1869–70 to 1874–75 in those constituencies with and without a new Conservative association in 1874 should be, for the most part, a comparison of constituencies which underwent organizational change with those which did not.⁵

The results of such a comparison (Table 5.2) are no more supportive of an Ostrogorski perspective than the previous analysis presented in Table 5.1. Of 154 Conservative MPs from England and Wales who sat (and voted) both in 1869–70 and in 1874–75, 65 had Conservative or Conservative Workingmen's associations in their constituencies by 1874. On average, the party support scores of these 65 MPs increased 5.6 percentage points from 1869–70 to 1874–75. This compares with an average increase in party support of 6.3 percentage points for the 89 MPs whose constituencies had not acquired some type of association by 1874.

If a finer categorization of organizational status is adopted, it becomes evident that MPs whose constituencies had clubs or registration associ-

⁵The number of associations affiliated with the NU by year was as follows: 1871, 289; 1872, 348; 1873, 407; 1874, 447; 1875, 472 (plus 228 branch associations). Unfortunately, it is not known precisely how many associations there were before 1871, nor is it known how many associations per constituency there were. Perhaps as many as 50–100 associations were original members in 1867. In 1874 there were 167 constituencies with associations, for an average of 2.68 associations per constituency. If we assume there were 150 associations in 1869, this would indicate 56 constituencies if we assume that the association-per-constituency ratio was constant. Hence, if we had a full sample we would be comparing 56 constituencies with high and constant organization, plus 111 which changed from low to high levels of organization, to 94 which remained at a low level. We do not have a full sample, of course, because not all constituencies returned Conservatives. If we are willing to assume that the sample of observations we do have – which requires a Conservative MP sitting in 1869 and 1874 – is random with respect to the possession of organization, then about 111/(111 + 56) = 66% of those districts having associations in 1874 should have acquired them in the period 1869–74. See McKenzie (1963: 150, 159–60).

Development of parliamentary parties

ations as the most advanced form of organization had the greatest average increase (.095) in discipline, while MPs whose constituencies had at most a party agent had the smallest average increase (.046). But the differences between organizational classifications are never statistically significant (even at the .1 level).

There is certainly considerable room for improving the analysis attempted here, which is based on fewer divisions than one would like and does not attempt to control for other possibly relevant variables. But the analysis as it stands lends very little if any support to Ostrogorski's thesis, and is consonant with the tenor of recent historical scholarship, which has discounted the importance of party organization (Vincent 1966; Berlington 1967–68; Feuchtwanger 1968; Hanham 1978). Local party associations may eventually have become important in the enforcement of party discipline in Parliament. But one cannot explain the earliest upward trends in party discipline, in the 1860s and 1870s, on the basis of organizational advance.

In the next three chapters, we investigate alternative explanations of the growth in party cohesion that hinge not on extra-parliamentary organization but rather on the centralization of legislative authority within Parliament. Change internal to Parliament – in particular the rise of the Cabinet – predated the full development of party organization in the constituencies and offers a rather different perspective on party cohesion.

6

The origin of the efficient secret

To my thinking at least, the gradual growth and final establishment of the Cabinet system has been of greater importance than anything in our constitutional history since the Revolution settlement. (the Earl of Balfour, 1927)¹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the procedure of the House of Commons was radically transformed. The basic rules and conventions both of public legislation, which dealt chiefly with matters of general or national concern, and of private legislation, which dealt with matters of personal or local concern under a different procedure, were entirely rewritten. In this chapter, the major developments in public legislation are reviewed. The central theme is the origin of the efficient secret (i.e., a Cabinet with not only executive but also legislative predominance) in the decline of the private member. The next section describes the Cabinet's increasing authority over public legislation in the period before 1867, and the corresponding diminishment of the private member – even in the midst of the so-called golden age of the private MP. The second section attempts to explain these changes, and the third looks to their consequences.

THE CENTRALIZATION OF LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE

In the eighteenth century, the Cabinet was almost purely an executive body. Ministers were responsible primarily for the administration of royal government, and the conception of their legislative duties extended only to the passage of measures (chiefly financial) necessary to the ordinary conduct of government. General measures of public policy, it was thought, “were properly the concern of Parliament as a whole, and should normally be introduced not by the government but by private members” (MacDonagh 1977: 5).

¹Bagehot (1936: xii).

Development of parliamentary parties

In keeping with these notions, the rules of procedure governing public legislation gave very little preference to ministers. Only ministers could recommend new taxes or charges upon the public revenue, but there was little distinction made in the legislative agenda between the government's business and that of private members, and all members enjoyed a number of formidable parliamentary rights by the exercise of which they might ensure a hearing for their grievances or ideas. Any member, for example, could raise a debate upon the presentation of a petition (such presentation having precedence over ordinary business) or could repeat as often as he wished the privileged motion that "the House do now adjourn," thus obstructing business indefinitely. Since there were no formal limits on debate, any member could filibuster proceedings of which he disapproved. And members still cherished the right to make motions "on the sudden," without any previous notice. Whatever else may be said, the eighteenth century procedure was certainly not designed to facilitate the passage of a legislative programme by the government.

The rules and conventions of procedure began to change in the new century, at first slowly and then more rapidly in the 1830s. Two examples can serve to indicate the nature of procedural reform: the increasing distinction made between the government's business and private members' business, and the erosion of individual parliamentary rights.

The introduction of Order Days in 1811 laid the foundations for both developments. Owing to the addition of a hundred Irish members after 1800 and to an augmentation of parliamentary business, the time available for government business became inadequate. Since the "notices of motion" put down in the House's schedule – the "Order Book" – were more numerous, and since these had to be dealt with before the House could proceed to the "Orders of the Day," this latter business, which was also listed in the Order Book and included items such as committee of supply and the stages of bills, was often not reached until after midnight. Members complained that the ministers were sneaking through controversial legislation at late hours, and the government responded with a proposal that the Orders of the Day should be given precedence on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This proposal was vigorously contested, but the choice was continued after-midnight sittings or some expedient, and the House accepted the ministerial proposal limited to Mondays and Fridays. From that point, it became customary to pass a resolution at the beginning of each session stating "That in the present session of Parliament, all Orders of the Day, set down in the Order Book for Mondays and Fridays, shall be disposed of before the House will proceed upon any motions of which Notices shall be entered in the Order Book."

This resolution was certainly to the advantage of the government, since

The origin of the efficient secret

most of its business came up in the form of Orders of the Day; but it also potentially benefitted private members who intended to introduce bills.² This was because the stages of bills also were considered as Orders of the Day and because no formal distinction had been made between the Orders of the Day of the government and those of private members. Thus, members who anticipated introducing bills might have favored the establishment of Monday and Friday Order Days, since their bills were more likely to pass.

In practice, however, it seems that the government dominated Order Days from the start. In the very next session (1812), a private member complained that "Ministers had assumed the right of calling for particular Orders, on the plea of expediting the public business," and moved that the resolution establishing Monday and Friday as Order Days be amended to indicate that the Orders of the Day should be taken "in exact rotation, as they stand in the Order Book."³ This amendment was negated on division, 15–58, and did not appear again until 1829.⁴ Then, it was merely suggested, and not pushed to a division.

In the next session (1830), two new suggestions appeared (made by backbenchers) which reveal the extent to which government precedence on Order Days had become customary. One MP suggested that the precedence of the government be recognized, but that *private members'* Orders be taken as they stood in the Order Book. Another wished to give the government precedence on two days, but to create a third Order Day (Wednesday) on which Orders would be taken in "regular rotation."⁵

This latter suggestion was put into force in the next session, although only on an "experimental" basis. On 13 July 1831, the House agreed to a motion by another backbencher that Wednesday be made an Order Day. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, speaking for the government, remarked that

²In 1833, Lord Althorp was careful to point out that if the special morning sittings he was proposing were limited to the Orders of the Day, then "not only might the public business proceed more rapidly, but such Gentlemen as had Bills in charge might be enabled to prosecute their completion." *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xix, 115. In 1834, when the government attempted to secure the precedence of Orders over notices for the remainder of the session, Secretary Rice argued that "As to the imputation, that this motion was made to favour the Government, other Members had as much interest in the Orders of the Day being admitted to precedence as the Government." *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxiv, 1290.

³*Parliamentary Debates*, 1st series, xxi, 111–12, and *Commons Journal*, 9 January 1812.

⁴*Mirror of Parliament*, 21 May 1829, p. 1799.

⁵*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, i, 130–42. As regards Mr. Robert Cutlar Ferguson's comments, I have relied on the version given in *Mirror of Parliament*, 3 November 1830, p. 53, which differs from that given in *Parliamentary Debates*.

Development of parliamentary parties

Undoubtedly, if the Right Honourable Baronet wishes that government shall have precedence on Wednesdays, as on the other Order Days, then the advantage contemplated by the Honourable Mover of this resolution will be small to those Gentlemen who have Bills pending; but I understand him to mean that Orders of the Day on Wednesdays shall have precedence according to the order in which they stand, without any preference to government.... it would be dangerous to make this a permanent regulation; but I have no objection to treat it as an experiment.⁶

Exactly one week later, the Chancellor tested the flexibility of this experiment by moving a government Order ahead of others.⁷ The history of Wednesday Order Days thenceforth was one of continual government encroachment and backbench complaints.⁸ After 1835, the Commons invariably designated Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays as Order Days at the beginning of each session, and the government seems increasingly to have established precedence (Fraser 1960).

What had started in 1811 as a division of the House's business into Order Days, on which Orders of the Day would have precedence, and Notice Days, on which notices of motion would have precedence, had become by the 1830s, if not sooner, a division between "government days" and "private members' days."

This segregation of official and unofficial business became an important factor in the erosion of the parliamentary rights of individual members, which began in earnest in the 1830s. Consider, for example, the right to amend a motion that a particular Order of the Day be taken next. Before the 1830s, such amendments were rare, and always germane – that is, they sought simply to substitute another Order of the Day for the one originally suggested. Beginning in the 1830s, however, members began to use such amendments in order to raid the government's time and raise debates on extraneous subjects.⁹

⁶*Mirror of Parliament*, 13 July 1831, p. 533. Note that Fraser's (1960: 453) assertion that 1835 marked the "first time a distinction was created between the business of the Government, and that of private members" is incorrect. Albeit "experimental," such a distinction was clearly entailed in the motion of 13 July 1831.

⁷*Mirror of Parliament*, 20 July 1831, p. 703.

⁸For government attempts to secure precedence on Wednesdays, see *Mirror of Parliament*, 14 May 1834, p. 1707; 21 May 1834, p. 1799; 13 June 1834, p. 2201; 1 July 1835, p. 1677; 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 22 June 1836, pp. 720–21. For backbench complaints concerning government precedence on Wednesdays, see *Mirror of Parliament*, 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 22 June 1836, pp. 721–24; 8 July 1836, p. 2293; 8 March 1837, p. 515; 21 March 1837, p. 783; 24 November 1837, pp. 193–203. During the busy 1830s, one finds a tendency toward the end of the session to pass resolutions making all days Order Days. Such a motion was first made on 27 August 1831, by a backbencher, and was first passed in 1833, four days before the end of the session. In the next session, a similar motion was carried 24 days before the session's end. In the next sessions, it was 34 days and then 50 days before the end of the session.

⁹This and the next two paragraphs are based on Fraser (1960).

The origin of the efficient secret

The basic problem was that the time reserved to private members became "polluted," especially after Wednesdays were made Order Days. Tuesdays and Thursdays, on which days it was proper for private members to raise general debates, fell into disrepute, for a variety of reasons. First, because of a greatly increased number of notices, the Order Book was filled for weeks in advance, and a lottery for precedence was instituted. This meant that the House had to face the luck of the draw. Since, as Lord Stanley told the House, "most of the notices were a mass of trash and rubbish to which no-one thought it worthwhile to attend, except for the member who gave the notice,"¹⁰ the luck of the draw was not apt to be edifying. Consequently, attendance on Tuesdays and Thursdays was poor – both by MPs and, in all probability, by reporters. Second, the government did not acknowledge any responsibility to make a House on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This did nothing to alleviate the problem of attendance. Third, ministers did not usually show up on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The result of all this was that those MPs who sought the attention of a full House, or the attention of the government, or the attention of the press – and through them, of the public out of doors – were motivated to raid the government's days by moving amendments to the routine motions of the Orders of the Day.¹¹ By 1837, the government found that a third of their days were being seized in this way by private members, and after a select committee reviewed the matter, amendments to particular Orders were forbidden by Standing Order. A number of other methods remained to secure the same effect, and after these had been discovered and their use became intolerable, all but one were abolished by resolutions passed in 1848 and 1849.

The segregation of government business from private members' business also had a deleterious effect on the ability of unofficial members to legislate. It was easy for a member to introduce a bill, have it read a first time, and then printed at state expense; but after that, progress was very uncertain. In part perhaps because of the attractiveness and ease of having a bill printed, the number of bills introduced by private members increased. The resulting lottery for time eventually made it virtually impossible for a private member to pass a bill which was controversial, since anyone opposed to it could talk it out on the night it came up, and the chances of securing more time later in the session were slim.¹² Thus,

¹⁰*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxxiv, 199, quoted in Fraser (1960: 453).

¹¹It might also be noted that the rules of the House were such that it was unusual for one notice to have precedence over another. Thus, a member wishing to bring up some matter in a timely fashion, even if he was perfectly willing to bring it up on a Tuesday or Thursday, probably found this considerably more difficult than raiding one of the Order Days.

¹²The difficulty of passing bills by private effort was heightened because combining with like-minded colleagues in order to shorten the odds was frowned upon. On 19

Development of parliamentary parties

increasingly, private members' bills could be passed only with the help of ministers, or if they were unopposed and lucky. Between 1846 and 1868 only eight private members' bills that ministers had opposed at any stage passed into law (Guowich 1984: 630).¹³

Attitudes toward legislation reflected the clearly altered balance of power. As late as 1836 Melbourne proclaimed the older view that "the duty of a government is not to pass legislation but to rule" (MacDonagh 1977: 5); as late as 1844 Sir Robert Peel defended the right of independent members to legislate (Todd 1869, vol. ii: 63); but these notions were changing, under the stress of events, as early as the 1830s. It is difficult to know precisely when the newer conceptions – viz., that the government was responsible for legislation as well as administration, that all important measures should and would emanate from the ministry, that few if any measures should or could pass against the ministry's wishes – became dominant. But it seems safe to say that by 1848 they were at least well on their way to being so. Three events in that year can be taken as illustrations of the trend. First, one finds Lord John Russell chafing under the "supposed duty of the Members of a government to introduce (and carry) a great number of measures... a duty which is new to the government of this country."¹⁴ Second, a select committee on procedure recommends, and the House enforces, the abolition of various parliamentary maneuvers which private members had been using to force their concerns upon the attention of the House. Third, the committee report clearly acknowledges the primary importance of the ministry in legislation, concluding "that the satisfactory conduct and progress of the busi-

June 1876 the Speaker noted that "If two or more Members of the House holding the same opinion on some specific motion combine together to ballot for precedence ... such a practice is an evasion of the rules of the House" (Howarth 1956: 188).

¹³In the early 1870s, out of 120 bills introduced by unofficial members in the average session, only 25 to 30 were passed into law (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxxi, 581–82) and generally only 10 to 15 per annum reached the statute books by the end of the century (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 314). These figures can be compared with those Lord Russell gave in a speech in 1848 defending his government against charges of ineptitude and lack of vigor: "I find that out of 125 Bills introduced by the Government during the present Session, 105 Bills have been already passed, or have received so much of the sanction of the House as to make it probable that they will receive the assent of the Crown during the present Session" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ci, 710). My own count (from *Commons Papers* 1847–48, vol. li, p. 13) indicates that the government passed 96 of 124 bills in the 1847–48 session, or 77%. This is about the same percentage one finds in the early 1870s (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxxi, 581–82). Another indication of the increasing power of the Cabinet, suggested by Beattie (1970: 80), is the degree to which "appeals to party 'discipline' ... were replacing the use of the House of Lords to resist Private Members' Bills which the government opposed."

¹⁴*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, ci, 709–10.

The origin of the efficient secret

ness of the House must mainly depend upon her Majesty's government, holding as they do the chief control over its management.”¹⁵

By 1855, Sir Charles Wood could review his career in Parliament in the following terms:

When I was first in Parliament [in 1825], . . . the functions of the government were chiefly executive. Changes in our laws were proposed by independent members, and carried, not as party questions, by their combined action on both sides. Now, when an independent member brings forward a subject it is not to propose a measure himself, but to call to it the attention of the government.

(Ilbert 1914: 52)

In 1861 the *Illustrated London News* noted that “All legislation is passing into the hands of the government,” and Gladstone eight years later “thought he put it moderately when he said that nine tenths of the legislation of the house, looking to numbers and importance, passed through the hands of the government.”¹⁶

THE CAUSES OF PROCEDURAL CHANGE

All told, the evidence regarding the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet is quite clear. While there is no particular watershed date to point to, the executive’s dominance over public legislation was widely recognized by the 1860s, thanks largely to the work of such authors as Alpheus Todd and, above all, Walter Bagehot. Bagehot’s famous assertion (first made in 1865 in the *Fortnightly Review*) that the “efficient secret of the English Constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers” was so effective and celebrated a statement because he was the first to recognize and interpret for a wide audience a new, increasingly obvious, and important feature of English government.¹⁷

¹⁵Commons Papers, 1847–48, vol. xvi, p. 146.

¹⁶Gurowich (1984: 630); Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, cxcvii, 1188.

¹⁷Beyond the *Illustrated London News* comment in 1861 quoted earlier, one might note the following observations made in a scholarly text first published in 1866: “The rule that all great and important measures should emanate from the executive has of late years obtained increasing acceptance. The remarkable examples to the contrary, which are found in parliamentary history antecedent to the first Reform Acts, could not now occur, without betokening a weakness on the part of ministers of the crown which is inconsistent with their true relation towards the House of Commons. . . . Sir Robert Peel, in 1844, insisted that individual members of Parliament had a perfect right to introduce such measures as they thought fit, without the sanction of the government. . . . But of late years the great increase of debates, and the annual accumulation of arrears of public business, have combined to render it practically impossible for Bills introduced by private members to become law, unless by the active assistance of the government” (Todd 1869, vol. II: 63–64). Contemporaries did not

Development of parliamentary parties

Less clear than the fact of the Cabinet's growing control of the legislative agenda, however, was its cause. One might ask two questions. First, why did the parliamentary rights of private members decline? Second, why was the Cabinet the apparent beneficiary of this decline? As regards the first of these questions, recent scholarship emphasizes the growth in volume and complexity of parliamentary business (Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968; Ramm 1984). Between 1760 and 1808 the items of business increased four-fold, and the pace thereafter does not seem to have slackened (Fraser 1960: 446, n. 1). Moreover, legislation tended to become more and more technical and complex as the century wore on: "At last it became obvious that the amount of business far exceeded the limited time available . . . To get the parliamentary machine going some restraint was inevitable" (Cromwell 1968: 15–16).

This emphasis on the limited time available to conduct a rising tide of business is essentially correct as an explanation of the proximal or immediate causes of procedural change. Time was limited, and business, and hence the demand for time, did increase. Some species of limitation on debate, essentially the rationing of an extremely scarce resource among legally equal members, was to be expected, as were efforts to streamline procedure. But the time pressure model has its shortcomings. First, it is rarely clear why the particular new rules chosen to economize time, rather than others, were in fact chosen. Second, the model leaves one wondering why and how the demand for legislative time increased.

The conventional answer to the latter query is that the rapid expansion of the British economy and population raised new interests in society and new problems to be solved.¹⁸ At a general level, this is undoubtedly true. But it may help to focus more narrowly on the *demand by MPs for legislative time* (where "legislative time" is defined as time on the floor of the House and in Committee of the Whole). Virtually all items of business took up legislative time and required the intercession at some stage of an MP. Thus, another way of saying that business increased is to say that MPs became more active, and a study of the participation of MPs in debate, in divisions, and in the proceedings of the House generally may offer an illuminating alternative perspective on the growth of business.

have to read scholarly texts to find similar estimates of the Cabinet's importance. Walter Bagehot's series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* in the mid-1860s (which later were collected in the *English Constitution*) popularized the distinction between the "dignified" and "efficient" parts of the constitution and made it clear that the "efficient secret," the controlling power of the English government, lay in the Cabinet.

¹⁸Gladstone, in a speech made in 1882, attributed the growth of business to three main causes: the enlargement of the Empire, the expansion of trade relations, and the enlargement of the conception of the function of government. See Redlich (1908: xix).

The origin of the efficient secret

Table 6.1. Speaking in Parliament, 1820–96

Session	(1) MPs listed in ses- sional index	(2) Duration of session (months)	(3) Column (1) as per- centage of all MPs
1820	201	7	30.5
1822	235	6	35.7
1825	241	5	36.6
1828	241	6	36.6
1833	395	7	60.0
1835	378 ^a	6	57.4
1852–53	385	6	58.5
1863	418	6	63.5
1874	444	5	67.5
1883	458	6	69.6
1896	578	6	86.3

Note: Hansard's was the standard record of the parliamentary debates, and it generally ran to several volumes in a session. An MP was included in the index if he spoke in debate, asked a question, made a motion, or otherwise addressed the chair. Column (1) gives the number of MPs listed in the cumulative sessional index for years in which such an index existed. For sessions in which there was no cumulative index, the indexes to each volume in the session were used – with, of course, due attention given to double counting. All MPs, not just English MPs, were counted.

^aIn this year, the index to the last volume of the year did not distinguish between peers and MPs, so the next-to-last volume was used instead. In that volume, 360 MPs were listed, and a 5% addition was made to this figure to give 378; 5% was chosen after examination of the increases from volume to volume in that year, and of the first-to-last-volume increases in other years.

Source: Author's compilation from Hansard's, for all years except 1833 and 1883, which are from Mackintosh (1962: 181).

It should first be noted that more and more MPs did participate in the proceedings of the House as the century wore on, as can be seen in Table 6.1. Column (1) in the table gives the number of MPs listed in the index to the *Parliamentary Debates* in selected sessions. These MPs were those who had spoken in debate, asked questions, made motions, or otherwise participated in the business of the House in such a fashion as to merit entry in the *text*, hence the index (simply voting did not get one an entry in either the text proper or the index). The figures in column (1) give an idea of the number of active members of Parliament in each of various sessions in the nineteenth century. Evidently, the active complement of MPs increased throughout the century. Whereas in the 1820s about 35% of the Commons were active enough to merit inclusion in Hansard's index, by 1835 57%, by 1874 two-thirds, and by 1896 nearly seven-eighths of all MPs were included.

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 6.2. *Voting participation in Parliament, 1836–99*

Year	Total number of divisions	Percentage of divisions participated in by average MP	Number of divisions participated in by average MP
1836	187	22.8	43
1850	329	26.8	88
1860	265	25.3	67
1871	270	34.1	92
1881	411	36.6	150
1894	246	42.1	104
1899	363	38.6	140

Source: Participation rates were computed from the data given in Lowell (1902). All MPs, not just English MPs, are included in this analysis.

MPs also participated in divisions more often as the century progressed (Table 6.2). In the three sessions of 1836, 1850, and 1860, the typical MP voted in only about a quarter of all divisions; after the second Reform Act, participation rates increased to about 35%; and by the 1890s, MPs typically voted in about 40% of all divisions.¹⁹

The question is, Why did more and more MPs take an active role in the affairs of the House? Why, to take a specific example (Table 6.1), was there such a striking increase in speaking from the 1820s to the post-reform period?

One answer might rely on the expansion of the press. As early as 1833, C. W. Wynn complained in the Commons that the length of debates was increasing and attributed this to the reportage of debates:

In consequence of the publication of the debates, Members were anxious that their constituents should see that they took part in the discussion; and the consequence was, that hon. Gentlemen delivered arguments that had been urged by former speakers, not regarding what had been previously stated, provided they had the opportunity of delivering their sentiments.²⁰

The importance of a favorable reception in the press was increasingly evident, and after the fire of 1834 the Commons moved to new quarters which, for the first time, had a gallery reserved for reporters. A common argument in favor of motions that the House not proceed with new business after midnight was that the press could not report debates at

¹⁹Fair, in his study of party voting behavior, calculates attendance rates for every year from 1886 to 1918. He finds that average attendance increased from 35.12% in 1887–92 to 40.94% in 1893–1904 to 48.46% in 1905–14 (Fair 1983: 7).

²⁰Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, xv, 1013.

The origin of the efficient secret

such a late hour.²¹ By the end of the century, an article on parliamentary reporting had this to say about the treatment of reporters by MPs:

Their [the MPs'] courtship is assiduous; none more eager than they to send upstairs, unsolicited, the notes of their speeches, occasionally the speech itself in extenso; nay, they will often track the reporter to his lair and plead with him to do justice to their eloquence. There are no members who are never reported; even the most insignificant is reported in his local paper. (Nicholson 1905)

The achievement of universal press coverage of Parliament, so that even the most insignificant member might be reported, followed the explosive expansion of the press in the middle of the century. The number of English provincial newspapers had increased nine-fold between 1824 and 1886, with the increase in the United Kingdom as a whole being comparable.²²

Doubtless the expansion of the press played a role in spurring members to rhetorical heights. But the implicit assumptions in this argument should be noted. Only if constituents reacted to the behavior of their MPs in Parliament and MPs cared about reelection would increased press coverage have stimulated legislative prolixity.²³ Hence, the nature and independence of the constituencies underpinned the importance of press coverage.

Indeed, a factor more obviously important in the increased activity of the reformed Parliament than the growth of newspapers was simply the first Reform Act's disfranchisement (in whole or in part) of the smallest and rottenest boroughs, with the seats thus freed given to the counties and to previously unrepresented boroughs (including such large northern cities as Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and Sheffield).²⁴ The MPs who sat for the boroughs newly enfranchised under schedules III and IV of the Reform Act were more than twice as likely to participate in debate than had been MPs sitting for boroughs disfranchised by that Act, and redistricting alone thus goes some way toward explaining the increase in participation.²⁵

²¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxvi, 853; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 271, 273–74.

²² The growth of the English press can be seen in Table 2.1.

²³ Both these assumptions seem quite tenable – see Chapters 7 and 12.

²⁴ Some of the largest northern cities had already secured indirect representation in Parliament by purchasing boroughs elsewhere, but most of the cities enfranchised by the Reform Act had not previously had any representation. See Wooley (1938: 240).

²⁵ In February 1830, only 29 of the 162 MPs sitting for boroughs disfranchised under schedule I or II spoke in debate. In February 1835, 25 of the 64 MPs sitting for boroughs enfranchised under schedule III or IV spoke in debate. Thus, redistricting partially replaced a group of MPs only 18% of whom participated in a given month with a group over 39% of whom participated. The overall participation rates in both months were comparable, so that the difference in participation presumably lies with the differing political expectations faced by MPs for large places and for small places, as indicated in the text.

Development of parliamentary parties

More generally, the increase in participation can be traced to the greater size of the constituencies after 1832. A recent study suggests an 80% increase overall in the electorate after the passage of the first Reform Act (Cannon 1973). Mitchell (1967: 46) has noted the lax attendance of members from pocket boroughs in 1818–20, and in general one suspects that MPs sitting for smaller boroughs had less electoral incentive to participate in the proceedings of the House than did MPs sitting for larger boroughs and counties. There are two related lines of reasoning to suggest this conclusion. The first is basically economic. It had long been an accepted part of the MP's job to promote and protect the local economic interests of his constituents. This duty lay heavier on MPs representing areas with more important or numerous interests – i.e., the larger towns and industrialized county districts – both in the sense that there was more to do and in the sense that it was more essential to do it if one was to stay in office. Thus, MPs from large districts ought in general to have been busier than MPs from small districts because of the necessity of managing local economic interests.

Another line of reasoning is more political but is similar in that it focuses on a change in the relative effectiveness of the various strategies available to MPs. Briefly, the argument runs as follows: First, the smaller boroughs could be controlled by influence, bribery, and the judicious distribution of patronage more easily than could the larger boroughs and counties, where it was often essential also to engage in the politics of opinion; and second, influence, bribery, and patronage did not require any activity on the floor of the House or in Committee of the Whole, whereas enacting policy did. Thus, MPs who had engaged in the politics of opinion in their constituencies were motivated to participate in Parliament, and these MPs were generally from the larger constituencies.

The second part of the foregoing argument – that influence, bribery, and patronage did not require floor action – is fairly obvious; but the first part requires further examination. The most thorough recent study of the major boroughs notes that “the larger electorates... could never be managed simply through the influence of an elite personally rewarded by seats on the bench and so an MP had to give a lead to local opinion” (Fraser 1976: 182). Bribery is generally thought to have been a controlling electoral factor only in the small towns. This message comes out clearly in Hanham's magisterial survey (Hanham 1978), and contemporaries evidently believed it as well: When Parliament sought to deal with bribery that had become too extensive, their method was often simply to expand the offending borough's boundaries so as to include more electors.²⁶

²⁶For typical contemporary assertions of the unworkability of bribery in large constituencies, see the *Report from the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections*, vol. I (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1968), pp. 42, 49, 93.

The origin of the efficient secret

The reason for the lesser reliance on bribery and influence in the larger boroughs seems to be that these electoral strategies were simply less effective there – at least relative to the strategy of taking stands on matters of national policy. Certainly a fixed amount of money would buy a smaller proportion of the total votes in larger towns if the average price of votes was not less. Even if the price of votes was less (in proportion to the greater number of voters) one would presume that the costs of arranging to bribe many more electors, not to mention the increased risk of being caught, made bribery a less attractive electoral option. Similarly, a fixed amount of patronage must have been less useful – i.e., must have secured a smaller proportion of the total vote. Even if the implicit price of a vote in jobs was less in larger towns, the increased transactions costs (as in the case of bribery) probably diminished the electoral return. Finally, a fixed amount of influence could affect a smaller proportion of the vote as well in a larger constituency.

In contrast, a given policy promise – to disestablish the Irish church, for example – would almost certainly appeal to a larger *number* of voters in larger towns and may have appealed to a larger proportion. One suspects, therefore, that candidates in the larger and more independent boroughs engaged in the politics of opinion more thoroughly than their colleagues in the smaller towns because it made electoral sense to do so.²⁷

If it is correct that the requirements of popular or mass politicking led candidates to stress policy as an important element in their campaigns, and if larger towns did generate more economic business for their MPs to take care of, then one ought to find that MPs from the larger constituencies generally participated in the business of the House of Commons more frequently than did MPs from the smaller boroughs. This is indeed what one finds. Consider, for example, participation in debate (Table 6.3). From 19 February to 19 March 1835, only 23.5% of those back-bench MPs sitting for English boroughs with fewer than 2,000 electors spoke in debate. In contrast, 51.5% of MPs sitting for large English boroughs caught the Speaker's eye. Similarly, among English county MPs, those sitting for the larger constituencies were almost twice as likely to participate in debate.²⁸ In June and July of 1859, 42.2% of private mem-

²⁷The same line of reasoning would indicate that the expansion of the electorate after 1832 ought to have made policy a more necessary component of elections in many constituencies. In this regard, it is interesting to recall that after 1832 it became generally customary for a candidate to issue addresses in the newspapers to his prospective constituents, informing them of his candidacy and of the general lines of policy he would support. See Bulmer-Thomas (1965: 81). See also the comments on the necessity of public speaking in larger constituencies in Lowell (1912, vol. I: 445).

²⁸The relationship between speechifying and size of constituency was mild in a correlational sense. The correlation between the number of registered electors in an MP's constituency and whether or not he spoke in debate was .20 for borough MPs

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 6.3. Size of constituency and speaking in Parliament

Constituency type and number of electors	Percentage of MPs speaking
<i>Panel I: 19 February 1835 to 19 March 1835</i>	
Boroughs ($\leq 2,000$ electors)	23.5
Boroughs ($> 2,000$ electors)	51.5
Counties ($\leq 5,000$ electors)	16.4
Counties ($> 5,000$ electors)	28.6
<i>Panel II: 31 May 1859 to 13 August 1859</i>	
Boroughs ($\leq 2,000$ electors)	42.2
Boroughs ($> 2,000$ electors)	66.2
Counties ($\leq 5,000$ electors)	36.0
Counties ($> 5,000$ electors)	43.2

Note: All English backbenchers not from universities were included in this analysis.

Source: *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxvi, clv, index.

Table 6.4. Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1841–47

Constituency type and number of electors	Average participation rate	N
Boroughs ($\leq 2,000$ electors)	44.8	210
Boroughs ($> 2,000$ electors)	50.7	59
Counties ($\leq 5,000$ electors)	41.9	54
Counties ($> 5,000$ electors)	50.3	70

Note: Because Professor Aydelotte chose his sample to include well-attended divisions, the participation rates here are higher than those in Table 6.2, where the figures are based on all divisions. All English MPs not sitting for universities who were both elected in 1841 and still members of Parliament at the dissolution in 1847 were included in the analysis.

Source: Aydelotte (n.d.).

bers sitting for small boroughs spoke, versus 66.2% of those sitting for large boroughs.

MPs with large constituencies were also more likely to vote in divisions, as can be seen in Tables 6.4 and 6.5. Both in the Parliament of 1841–47 and in that of 1852–57 the voting participation rates of MPs serving large constituencies were 6 to 9 percentage points higher than the corresponding rates for MPs serving small constituencies.

and .22 for county MPs (both correlations significant at the .05 level). The correlation with total population was .15 for urban MPs and .39 for rural MPs.

The origin of the efficient secret

Table 6.5. *Size of constituency and voting participation in Parliament, 1852–57*

Constituency type and number of electors	Average participation rate	N
Boroughs ($\leq 2,000$ electors)	40.9	304
Boroughs ($> 2,000$ electors)	47.4	99
Counties ($\leq 5,000$ electors)	36.3	53
Counties ($> 5,000$ electors)	45.0	108

Note: Because Professor Bylsma chose his sample to include well-attended divisions, the participation rates here are higher than those in Table 6.2, where the figures are based on all divisions. All English MPs not sitting for universities were included in the analysis.

Source: Bylsma (1968).

What is suggested, then, is that the politics of large places required both a different kind of campaigning and greater activity in Parliament. The increased demand for legislative time was not due solely to industrialization and the creation of new problems that had to be dealt with legislatively. Were this the full story, one would expect parliamentary business to have ebbed and flowed with the gross national product. Yet the striking thing about both the figures on participation in debate (Table 6.1) and those on attendance at divisions (Table 6.2) is the contrast between the periods demarcated by the Reform Acts. Before 1832, the figures on participation range over only a 6% interval, between 30.5% and 36.6%; between 1832 and 1867 the figures again cluster within 6% of one another, but this time at almost double the level; between the second and third Reform Acts, the two figures are within 2% of each other, and higher than any previous figures. The similar clustering of attendance rates and the burst of procedural reforms in the 1830s strongly suggest that the increased demand by MPs for legislative time was an *electoral phenomenon*, driven chiefly by the growth of the constituencies.

Ironically, when the desire of private members to participate in the legislative process increased, when, as Sir Robert Peel put it, “there was a great appetite for legislation, and a strong desire among hon. Members to be distinguished as the introducers of new laws,”²⁹ the rights of private members began to fall away. As seen in the previous section, by the 1860s a number of parliamentary maneuvers traditionally available to members

²⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xxxix, 197.

Development of parliamentary parties

had been outlawed, the number and importance of Acts carried by private members were considerably diminished, and it was generally agreed and expected that major legislation should and would emanate from the ministry. Thus, an apparent increase in the desire of members to participate was followed by a diminution of their ability to do so meaningfully.

The logic of this ironical outcome is fairly clear. There were only so many hours the House could sit in a year, and the point of great inconvenience would of course be reached long before the absolute limit. When more and more MPs became active in parliamentary affairs, thus increasing the aggregate demand for legislative time, the amount of time the average member could dispose of in the ordinary course of business had necessarily to decline.³⁰ But if members had the unrestrained extraordinary power to seize the attention of the House at virtually any time, they would use this power, and business would become chaotic. The Commons, in other words, faced the “tragedy of the commons.”³¹ Each MP wished to exercise the extraordinary parliamentary rights available to him in order to ventilate his, or his constituents’, grievances and opinions; but when too many did exercise their rights, the cumulative effect was distressing to all MPs: at any sitting some solon might insist on bringing his nostrum to the floor more or less forcibly, hence hot air could not be anticipated and avoided, the House might have to sit late, even past midnight, in order to finish the public business, and the session might be extended into the dog days of August, when two kinds of hot

³⁰To some extent, more time could be manufactured by sitting longer hours, streamlining procedure, and allowing the simultaneous use of time. The first of these was always available as a short-term, easily implemented and adjusted response to increased demand. But working longer hours was not a solution which MPs were eager to accept as permanent. The easiest permanent improvement, which the House eventually exploited fully, was in the direction of efficiency: dropping superfluous stages of business (e.g., in 1849 the procedure of bills was shortened by the abolition of the formal question and division as to engrossing the bill) and ensuring that no stage took more time than was necessary (e.g., in 1848 it was decided that when leave had been given to bring in a bill, the questions of the first reading and printing would be decided without debate or amendment moved). A somewhat different method of economizing time was to allow its simultaneous use by more than one member or piece of business. Thus, non-controversial bills could be passed through various of their stages en masse, a single debate was deemed sufficient to deal with a number of related petitions, a single answer would be given to a number of related (or even unrelated) questions.

³¹The “tragedy of the commons” refers, in its original and most specific usage, to the overgrazing of common grasslands. See Hardin (1968). The underlying logic has been generalized to include a vast array of social phenomena, from the dumping of sewage in a common waterway, to the extraction of oil from a common pool, to the littering of public parks, to the tendency of cocktail parties to become shouting matches. The “commons” has become “a paradigm for situations in which people so impinge on each other in pursuing their own interests that collectively they each might be better off if they (all) could be restrained, but no one gains individually by self-restraint” (Schelling 1978: 111). For a review of related issues, see Hardin (1982).

The origin of the efficient secret

air generally proved very unpopular. In order to extricate themselves from the dilemma in which they were entangled, the Commons repeatedly took the most obvious way out and abolished the rights that were being abused.

The more or less unwitting beneficiary of this series of procedural crises was the ministry. As the rights of unofficial members declined, control of the legislative agenda passed increasingly into the hands of the government – and thus came about the efficient secret: the “nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers” in the Cabinet.

This did not happen without a fight. Backbenchers complained about their loss of ability and about the usurpation of power by ministers even before 1832, and continued to complain throughout the century.³² As early as 1836, a private member lamented that “from the manner in which the business before us has lately been gone through, it would appear as if none but members of the government can bring forward any measure. I have been, night after night, endeavouring to bring in a measure in which many of my constituents are deeply interested . . . but all in vain.”³³ This kind of feeling among backbenchers was exploited by the Conservatives in 1838 to defeat Lord John Russell’s motion that Orders of the Day be given precedence on Thursdays. In making his motion, Russell had been careful to note that, besides the government bills, “there were several bills brought in by individual Members” which would be advantaged by his motion.³⁴ But the real reason for the government’s interest in creating more Order Days was that the House of Lords, dominated by the Conservatives, had been rejecting important government measures, using the excuse that the measures came up too late in the session for proper consideration. With enough Order Days, the ministry hoped to remove this excuse. The Conservatives accordingly took the offensive. Goulburn (Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1828–30 and 1841–46) led off by accusing the government of attempting to procure “a larger portion of precedence than any other government had ever enjoyed,” and he emphasized that “the motion of the noble Lord had a direct tendency to prevent any Gentleman who might have to call the attention of the House to any grievance, or any matter of interest to his constituents . . . from bringing [his motion] forward in due time.”³⁵ Graham (Secretary of State for the Home Department under Peel in 1841–46) then scored

³²See *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st series, xxi, 111–12; *Mirror of Parliament*, 20 July 1831, p. 703; 27 August 1831, p. 1705; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ix, 126, 150; *Mirror of Parliament*, 21 May 1829, p. 1799; 16 June 1834, p. 2227; 12 August 1835, p. 2451; 8 July 1836, p. 2293; 11 March 1837, p. 598; 21 March 1837, p. 783; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlvi, 598–99.

³³*Mirror of Parliament*, 8 July 1836, p. 2293.

³⁴*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlvi, 598.

³⁵*Ibid.*

Development of parliamentary parties

the “attempt on the part of the government, at engrossing to themselves those opportunities which independent Members had hitherto enjoyed of bringing forward questions of importance... he would not wish to look at this question with reference to his own side of the House merely [the Conservatives were in a minority], but he would appeal to... all hon. Members on the other side, who were unconnected with the government, whether this was a fitting, proper, or even convenient course?”³⁶ Peel himself then spoke, remarking that he “could not avoid perceiving that there was a growing tendency to discourage the bringing forward of measures by independent Members.”³⁷ Apparently, the Conservatives were successful in arousing the Liberal backbenchers, for Russell withdrew his motion. The rights of backbench members were not given up easily.

Another point that should be emphasized is that even though backbench rights did dwindle, unofficial members did not immediately or obviously become legislative nonentities. What was lost in the 1830s and 1840s was the power of *independent initiative*: private MPs could no longer expect to initiate and carry major bills. They still retained, however, even into the 1870s and beyond, some power of indirect initiative. First, especially in the period 1846–68, the House of Commons was quite active in choosing and deposing ministries. Governments typically resigned rather than dissolve Parliament when defeated (see Chapter 8), and the usual pattern was for ministries to fall on specific substantive issues. Second, independent members could still introduce bills in order to publicize issues out of doors, and to pressure the Cabinet into action. Third, and perhaps most important, the legislative initiative of individual members was diverted into the question period.

Although asked as early as 1721, questions in their modern usage were largely a development of the period after the first Reform Act. By 1835 questions had become frequent enough so that the practice began of giving formal notice of the questions to be asked, by printing them on the Notice Paper. The growth in the number of questions placed on the Notice Paper was considerable after mid-century: where there were 212 in 1850, there were 699 in 1860, 1,203 in 1870, and 1,546 in 1880 (Chester and Bowring 1962: 316). Disraeli referred to questions in 1868 as one of the most important prerogatives of MPs (Howarth 1956: 190). After 1869, questions were placed in a special part of the Notice Paper, and a fixed portion of time was allotted to them in the hour before the commencement of the public business. The familiar question period, in other words, had arrived.

³⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlvi, 599.

³⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, xlvi, 603.

The origin of the efficient secret

Questions were more frequently used because they could be made to serve some of the purposes which had led members to abuse their other rights. If MPs could no longer easily secure the time necessary to impress their constituents with their prowess in debate, they could show themselves vigilant in the defense of local interests by asking pointed questions.³⁸ Thus, one finds MPs inquiring about local appointments, local postal service, local construction, and so forth.³⁹ Questions could also be used to publicize a cause or grievance, and after the reforms of 1848 had done away with most of the devices whereby MPs had broken irregularly into debate, increasing use was made of them as vehicles to prod the ministry into legislative action. Howarth notes that “there was between 1848 and 1867 a steady growth in the efficacy of questions as a means of bringing about desirable reforms.... Questions which led governments to reconsider their policy, and in some cases to make important changes in the law, were asked on subjects ranging from Cleopatra’s Needle to assaults on females, from vaccination to communication between railway passengers and guards” (Howarth 1956: 149). The growing use of questions to influence the government’s course of action was yet another implicit recognition of the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet, and indeed it reinforced and accelerated this process by pressuring ministers to legislate on matters that they might otherwise not have pursued.

In addition to the continuing ability to prod the government into action (or inaction), backbenchers could also significantly amend government legislation once it was introduced. Table 6.6 gives the number of amendments to government bills (not including the estimates) carried against the government whips acting as tellers in each “Parliament” from 1853–56 to 1901–05. Anywhere from three to six amendments per year were carried against the government until the Parliament of 1874–79. Moreover, the number of ministerial measures altered by the House was of course greater than the number of amendments carried against the government whips. And even individual members could have an impact. In a debate in 1874 on the motion that no new business be taken after half past midnight, one member objected on the ground that the rule had led to “lobby legislation” in the last Parliament:

The government were at all times anxious to get their Bills through the House before the end of July, and on account of this Rule had to compromise with private Members who had Amendments on them. They had to go into the lobby

³⁸ Lowell and Bagehot both noted the desire to please constituents as a common motivation for asking questions. See Lowell (1912, vol. I: 332) and Bagehot (1936: 160).

³⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clxxxiv, 116, 711; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 269, 409; *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clvii, 103.

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 6.6. Amendments carried against the government whips

Parliament	Number of amendments	Years	Average number per year
1853–56	25	4	6.25
1857–58	6	2	3.00
1859–65	27	7	3.86
1866–68	17	3	5.67
1869–73	20	5	4.00
1874–79	1	6	0.17
1880–85	11	6	1.83
1886	2	1	2.00
1887–92	3	6	0.50
1893–95	1	3	0.33
1896–1900	1	5	0.20
1901–05	4	5	0.80

Note: The source for these figures gives the number of amendments to government bills (not including estimates) carried against the government whips acting as tellers in each year since 1850. I have grouped the years into Parliaments. Because not all years lay wholly within a given Parliament, I sometimes have had to be arbitrary.

Source: Lowell (1912, vol. i: 317, n. 2).

and square up with those private Members, and clauses were thus passed which were objectionable, and would not have been passed had they been discussed in the House.⁴⁰

Their continued power to amend and indirectly to initiate notwithstanding, one may wonder why private members did not push for some other solution to the procedural difficulties facing the House, one which would protect their rights better. After all, eventually their power of amendment decreased too, and their influence as individuals became quite negligible. Why, for example, did the House not develop a committee system in the 1830s along American or French lines? It is difficult to deal with such a question, but the important considerations seem to be these: First, the Cabinet already existed. Second, those members expert in procedural matters, and those most likely to be looked to for guidance in reforming the procedure, were for the most part ministers and former ministers. The most prominent members of all ten of the major select committees on procedure appointed during the century were men who had sat or were sitting in the Cabinet. These men had a considerable stake in the system as it stood, and were unlikely to recommend any diminution in the power of the Cabinet. Third, there was no natural organization to protect backbench rights against frontbench encroach-

⁴⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 278.

The origin of the efficient secret

ment. Putting aside the large number of inactive MPs, whose grasp of procedure was probably quite limited, even those with some expertise, who could foresee the ultimate consequences of the cumulation of incremental changes, were unlikely to have the resources or possibly even the desire to organize a cross-party backbench coalition. Fourth, many of the procedural changes were both incremental and caught up in specific substantive issues. The government asked for slightly more precedence so that some particular important bill could pass. Even if an MP disliked the precedent being established, which marginally damaged his future abilities, he might still prefer to acquiesce in the government's encroachment for the sake of the immediate issue.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROCEDURAL CHANGE

The consequences of the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet were myriad, and of fundamental importance to the further development of the English party system. We have already seen in the preceding chapter that what is still perhaps the best known explanation of the increase in party discipline in Parliament cannot explain the earliest increases in cohesion, those from 1860 to 1880. The rise of the Cabinet entailed several consequences which may account for this unexplained increase. As the ministry became more important, more men wished to belong to it, and Premiers could use the carrot of advancement and the stick of non-advancement to enforce discipline (Chapter 7); the threat of resignation or dissolution on the part of ministers carried more authority since resignation or dissolution might affect not just the administration of Her Majesty's government but also the whole course of legislation (Chapter 8); the attitude of the electorate changed, and electors began using their votes to determine control of the ministry rather than to determine the individual identity of the MP or MPs who represented them (see Part III).

Before we move on to deal with these consequences of the Cabinet's rise, one other point relating to the increased participation of MPs should be dealt with here. We have argued that the increased participation of MPs in the affairs of Parliament embroiled the Commons in a series of procedural dilemmas, and that to break out of these dilemmas the ancient procedural rights of private members were discarded. Another consequence of increased participation, adumbrated in Chapter 2, was that MPs more often found themselves voting on matters about which they had relatively little information. It has already been noted that attendance rates at divisions increased from about 25% in the 1830s to 40% in the 1890s. The total number of divisions held in an average session also

Development of parliamentary parties

increased, from 229 in the 1830s to 323 in the 1890s. The consequence of these changes was that the typical MP found himself voting in about 57 divisions in the 1830s, versus 129 at the end of the century (Table 6.2 gives figures for a few specific years). Moreover, there are other reasons to believe that MPs in the 1890s probably knew less about the motions on which they voted than had MPs earlier in the century. First, legislation generally became more technical and complex as the century progressed (Fraser 1960; Cromwell 1968). Second, in the 1830s, relatively few divisions were whipped, and the typical MP's attendance was largely self-determined. An MP often turned out to vote because he chose to, and he presumably chose to when he or his constituents cared about the matter under consideration – hence, when he or they knew something about it. In contrast, in the 1890s the whip organization was fully developed, and MPs less often chose the divisions in which they would participate on their own initiative.

The overall consequence of voting in more divisions, on more complex matters, and on matters not necessarily of personal or local interest was ignorance. MPs more often needed some quick way to make decisions, and the party cue was always available on whipped divisions. Indeed, unwhipped votes seem even to have become unpopular:

... when the division bell rings he hurries to the House, and is told by his whip whether he is an "aye" or a "no." Sometimes he is told that party tellers have not been put on, and that he can vote as he pleases. But open questions are not popular; they compel a member to think for himself, which is always troublesome. Not that a member is a mere pawn in the game, but the number of questions which even a member of Parliament has leisure and capacity to think out for himself is necessarily limited. (Redlich 1908, vol. i: xvii)

An efficient whip organization pestering MPs to attend, the belief by MPs that their constituents would not appreciate lax attendance ["Simon was condemned on the grounds that he had voted in only forty of the last two-hundred and twenty divisions Some had condemned [Oldroyd] for only voting in 72 out of a possible 190 divisions" (James 1970: 83, 112)], and, indeed, any factor pushing MPs to attend and vote, even when they had little grasp of the issues at stake, might have contributed to party cohesion simply by increasing the number of MPs voting in ignorance and thus willing to accept the party whip.

Given our current patchy knowledge of cohesion in Parliament, however, it is difficult to say how important increased attendance was to the growth of party cohesion. From what we do know, it appears that there was cross-sectional correlation as well as longitudinal correlation between attendance and cohesion: in any given year, the best-attended divisions were those on which the party lines were drawn most clearly,

The origin of the efficient secret

and over time both attendance and cohesion increased.⁴¹ But the cross-sectional correlation was moderate and may have arisen simply because important party issues were whipped vigorously, and our assessment of the longitudinal correlation (between the average attendance and cohesion in a session) is based on only seven years. Even if there were more data on which to base a conclusion, it is not clear exactly how to measure the importance to discipline of the increased number of decisions that MPs had to make. Since the typical MP in the 1870s voted in only thirty more divisions than had his predecessors in the 1830s, however, the assumption here will be that the informational problems faced by MPs do not explain the bulk of the increase in party discipline before the 1880s.

⁴¹The cross-sectional correlations between attendance and cohesion in the seven years documented by Lowell – 1836, 1850, 1860, 1871, 1881, 1894, and 1899 – were respectively -.04, .11, .15, .33, .39, .36, and .02. The attendance figures used were simply the total number of MPs participating in each division. The cohesion figures used were the averages of the Conservative and Liberal coefficients of cohesion in each division. The correlations for 1871, 1881, and 1894 are significant at the .05 level. The longitudinal correlation, between the mean attendance figure in a session and the mean cohesion figure in a session, was .91.

7

*The electoral connection
and ministerial ambition*

Why did men in the nineteenth century seek to enter Parliament? How many wished to stay once they had entered the “best club in London,” and how many aimed higher, eyeing a position in the ministry? In studying an age before surveys or polls, the answers to these questions must be largely indirect. But the answers are important. If members coveted admittance to the ministry, the Premier, who held the power of appointment, could establish a strong inducement to loyalty by making it clear that those who too frequently dissented would generally not receive office. Since members who sought ministerial positions usually had to acquire a certain amount of parliamentary experience – especially if they aspired to the Cabinet – they must have become at least instrumentally concerned with reelection, and a natural preliminary question concerns the number of members who sought to (and the number who did) stay in Parliament long enough to have a realistic shot at the ministry and especially the Cabinet.

Interest in reelection could stem from sources other than ministerial ambition, however, and the question of how many members were willing to put up with increasingly frequent election contests and the rigors of serving ever-larger popular constituencies is of interest in its own right. In the next section of this chapter, the desire of members to stay in office is reconnoitered. The second section turns to the question of specifically ministerial ambition and its significance for party discipline.

THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION

I expect, therefore, always that the man who holds the seat of power and profit, and whatever emolument or honour may tie him to it, will cling to it, and in proportion as he clings to it he will be ready to concede something to those who may wish to shift him.
(the Reverend Charles Stovel, May 1871)¹

¹Quoted in Hamer (1977: 33).

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

Men sought seats in the House of Commons for a great variety of reasons. Barristers-at-law who entered Parliament were commonly believed to benefit in their practice and to have better chances of securing a place on the judicial bench. These considerations were likely to be imputed as reasons for entering Parliament to the numerous barristers in or at the door of the Commons, and Sir Henry Hawkins took care in his autobiography to avoid this imputation, stating that he “had no eye on Parliament merely as a stepping stone to a judgeship” (Harris 1905: 177). The Commons was also an excellent position from which to secure a baronetcy or other honor. F. B. Smith (1966: 90) speaks of one MP as “trying to auction his vote in return for a baronetcy, the sole object of his entering the House” (as it turned out, he realized his ambition by “opportunely surrendering his seat to the Tory Lord Advocate”). Besides these more or less tangible reasons for entering Parliament, contemporaries and scholars have cited a number of others. A seat in the Commons conferred prestige and was also a gateway to high society; Robert Lowe spoke of “gentlemen wishing to get into society under the stimulus of their wives and daughters” as a familiar species of “non-political” members.² For the more political members there was the attraction of the Cabinet, and even if this pinnacle was not attained, members might still (at least earlier in the century) have a significant impact on policy. On a lesser plane, members enjoyed certain legal immunities, and one author has even noted the seat in St. Margaret’s Church and the reader’s ticket at the library of the British Museum – to both of which MPs had a right (MacDonagh 1897: 72–77).

For whatever reason men went to Parliament, if they wished to remain, or, as one contemporary put it, “long[ed] with the deepest longing to get back again,” then they had to concern themselves with reelection (MacDonagh 1897: 67). Even the so-called non-political members had to pay attention to electoral politics if they planned to continue in the House.

This necessity became increasingly pressing as the number of uncontested seats declined and the number of candidates increased. Nearly half of the seats in the United Kingdom were typically uncontested at general elections from 1832 through 1865; but only a quarter of all seats were uncontested in the three elections held between the second and third Reform Acts, and only a fifth were uncontested in the period 1885–1910. Correspondingly, the number of candidates increased: before 1867, only one election – that of 1832 – saw more than a thousand candidates in the field; after 1867, no election saw fewer than this number.

Faced with the increasing probability of electoral competition, were

²*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clxxxii, 159.

Development of parliamentary parties

MPs sensitive to those who had electoral power? The presumption of modern political science would be affirmative, and Victorians shared this presumption: they stated it in general terms, as did the Reverend Mr. Stovel, whose remarks to a Liberation Society conference began this section; and they were willing to act on it.

The tactics of pressure groups illustrate this willingness to act on a conception of the MP as a seeker of reelection. D. A. Hamer's illuminating study *The Politics of Electoral Pressure* shows that the typical repertoire of tactics employed by mid-Victorian pressure groups was increasingly centered on the electoral connection. Petitions, which earlier in the century were generally addressed to Parliament as a whole, came to include clauses affirming a resolve on the part of the signatories to use their votes in a particular way if MPs did not support the object of their prayer (Hamer 1977: 9). During elections, pressure groups attempted to secure pledges from the voters – both “positive” pledges, which bound the elector to vote for any candidate who committed himself to a particular policy, and the more constraining “negative” pledges, which bound the elector to vote for, and only for, candidates who had made the required commitment (Hamer 1977: 28). With sufficient discipline, a bloc of voters tied by common pledges could be dangled before the candidates. Hamer (1977: 29) writes that “some electoral strategists in the pressure groups, especially in the temperance movement, had a vision of a great bloc vote, completely detached from all other parties and issues. . . . Very strenuous efforts were made to segregate and coop up a ‘temperance vote’ through pledges and Electoral Associations. . . . An entire temperance electoral way of life developed: canvassing, pledges, meetings.”

Although not all pressure groups had such a grand vision of the bloc vote, most sought to organize and utilize a body of opinion in the electorate as the basis of their influence over MPs. *The Times*, in 1874, noted the great variety of groups which pushed particular issues on the attention of the electors:

A remarkable fact connected with the present general election is the numerous advertisements appearing in the newspapers from political and social organizations of every conceivable description, all appealing to the electors to vote only for those candidates, irrespective of party, who will pledge themselves to support the opinions or crotchets represented by the respective societies, and to make those opinions a test question at the election. . . . Among the leading organizations thus appealing to the electors may be enumerated the United Kingdom Alliance, for suppressing the liquor traffic; the Sunday Rest Association, for stopping all . . . traffic on Sundays; the Contagious Diseases Act Repeal Association, the Female Suffrage Association, the Sunday League, the Liberation Society, the Church Defence Society, the Peace Association, the Land Tenure Reform Society, the Free and Open Church Association, the Open Spaces' Preservation Society, the

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

Anti-Vaccination Society, the Licensed Victuallers' Protection Society, the Labour Representation League, the Protestant Electoral Union, &c.³

In their endeavor to secure influence, pressure groups sent a variety of straightforward messages to candidates. First, candidates might be informed that they could secure a certain number of votes by adopting a particular policy (when the pledges were mostly positive). Second, candidates could be threatened with the abstention of voters who, presumably, would otherwise vote for them (when pledges were negative). Third, independent candidatures might be bruited (Hamer 1977).

Although pressure groups after the Anti-Corn Law League appear to have been firmly committed to a strategy of electoral pressure, most of them were not conspicuously successful in getting their nostrums into the statute books, and one may wonder whether their failure stemmed from any inadequacy in their assumptions about how to pressure MPs. Did most MPs wish to be reelected?

One straightforward way to answer this question is to look at the percentage of MPs actually seeking reelection. Of course, it should be kept in mind that this percentage is an imperfect indicator of the percentage who would have been willing to face some standard cost and probability of defeat. First, some incumbents faced no competition and others only token competition, and their willingness to go to the poll against more formidable opponents must remain conjectural. Second, some of those not seeking reelection had died – obviously we do not know anything about their desire to be reelected. Third, others did not seek reelection because of elevations to the peerage or acceptance of some remunerative position in the colonies, the judiciary, or the Civil Service. For these men, all we know is that they did not so wish to remain in the (unsalaried) Commons that they were willing to forgo appealing opportunities elsewhere. Since generally only four or five days elapsed between the dissolution and the date at which the earliest constituency went to the poll, the importance of these last two points is greatly limited by our definition of an incumbent as an MP sitting at the dissolution. Still, the election typically dragged on for several weeks or a month (most constituencies did not begin polling until the middle or end of this period); and a dissolution was the logical time for new opportunities to be seized and, to a certain extent, for them to be offered.

A fourth point is more important: those MPs who anticipated too high a probability of defeat may have opted reluctantly not to seek reelection. In the days of open voting and small electorates, candidates could get a pretty good idea of their chances. Sir John Aubrey, a prospective can-

³*The Times*, London, 2 February 1874, p. 7.

Development of parliamentary parties

dicate for Buckinghamshire in 1789, addressed a letter asking for support to every freeholder of the county, later announcing that he had "not met with such an extensive Encouragement as will justify a Perseverance in offering himself" (Davis 1972: 39). The electorates, at least in many of the boroughs, remained small enough down to 1867 and even 1884 so that similarly comprehensive information gathering was feasible.

Finally, it should be noted that the figures we are about to present concern only the percentage of incumbents seeking reelection in the same constituencies for which they sat at the dissolution. Since some men went off to contest other places, however, the figures clearly underestimate the total percentage of MPs seeking reelection. This understatement would appear to range from about 1 to 5 percentage points.⁴

With these caveats in mind, we can turn to Table 7.1. Considering all MPs sitting for English provincial boroughs at each dissolution from 1835 to 1900, the table shows that only twice did fewer than 70% of these MPs seek reelection. In 1847, the first general election after the Conservative split over the Corn Laws, only 67.2% of the members wished to face their constituents, while in 1868, after the second Reform Act had nearly doubled the national electorate, only 69% of English provincial MPs sought reelection. On average, the percentage of MPs seeking reelection was somewhat higher than 70%, and this average increased over the century: it was 76.8% in 1835–65, 78.0% in 1868–80, and 86.0% in 1885–1900. This increasing tendency to seek reelection occurred despite a decreasing probability of success. Whereas on average 83.5% of incumbents seeking reelection were successful in 1835–65, this figure fell nearly 10 percentage points for the elections between the second and third Reform Acts, and recovered only to 79.0% in the post-1885 period. These figures reflect to a considerable degree trends in the number of uncontested constituencies.⁵

The same basic patterns appear if one looks only at incumbents who faced a contest for their seats. As might be expected on the assumption that MPs anticipated electoral competition and shunned too-high probabilities of defeat, fewer incumbents sought reelection in districts which saw an actual contest. But the percentage of MPs seeking reelection in contested districts also shows a definite upward trend: 75.6% in 1835–65, 77.8% in 1868–80, and 84.8% in 1885–1900. The success rates of

⁴The justification for this assertion comes from simply counting the number of incumbent MPs in each general election year who left their constituencies to contest another (whether at the general election or at a by-election in the same year). We have done this for elections from 1865 to 1900, and the percentages range from 1.2% in 1874 and 1886 to 4.9% in 1868, with an average of 2.5%.

⁵The average percentages of seats uncontested at general elections in the United Kingdom in the periods 1832–65, 1868–80, and 1885–1900 were 45%, 26%, and 21%, respectively.

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

Table 7.1. Incumbents in English provincial boroughs, 1835–1900

Year	Incumbents in all boroughs			Incumbents in contested boroughs		
	(1) ^a	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1835	.809	.841	.68	.807	.783	.63
1837	.792	.826	.65	.790	.777	.61
1841	.749	.846	.63	.741	.765	.57
1847	.672	.852	.57	.630	.741	.47
1852	.720	.815	.59	.689	.728	.50
1857	.759	.819	.62	.769	.707	.54
1859	.853	.883	.75	.848	.808	.69
1865	.791	.799	.63	.774	.708	.55
Avg.	.768	.835	.64	.756	.752	.57
1868	.690	.796	.55	.704	.769	.54
1874	.811	.719	.58	.799	.684	.55
1880	.840	.693	.58	.833	.676	.56
Avg.	.780	.736	.57	.778	.710	.55
1885	.813	.689	.56	.810	.682	.55
1886	.928	.825	.77	.915	.792	.72
1892	.843	.814	.69	.833	.800	.67
1895	.859	.750	.64	.843	.703	.59
1900	.855	.873	.75	.839	.818	.69
Avg.	.860	.790	.68	.848	.759	.64

Note: Incumbents are defined as the members sitting at the dissolution. The number of incumbents in provincial boroughs by this definition was essentially equal to the number of seats – only rarely was a vacancy created so late in the Parliament that it was not filled at a by-election. There were roughly 304 provincial seats in the period 1832–68, 263 in 1868–85, and 166 in 1885–1918. The first figure represents 46% of all the seats in Parliament at the time; the last, about a quarter.

^aColumn (1), proportion seeking reelection; column (2), success rate; column (3), survival rate [column (1) × column (2)]; column (4), proportion seeking reelection; column (5), success rate; column (6), survival rate [column (4) × column (5)].

Source: Author's compilation from the data of Craig (1974; 1977).

incumbents facing a contest were of course lower, and varied somewhat differently over time than the overall figures. They still indicate, however, that the increasing tendency to seek reelection did not come about simply because of an electoral climate more favorable for incumbents.

Indeed, the electoral weather appears to have been particularly harsh in the four consecutive general elections of 1868, 1874, 1880, and 1885. Whereas the average survival rate of incumbents (i.e., the proportion who actually continued to sit in Parliament for the same borough) was

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 7.2. *Incumbents in English counties, 1835–80*

Year	Incumbents in all countries			Incumbents in contested countries		
	(1) ^a	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1835	.87	.90	.78	.85	.68	.57
1837	.79	.96	.76	.78	.77	.60
1841	.80	.94	.76	.79	.79	.62
1847	.77	.98	.76	.62	.88	.54
1852	.90	.92	.82	.85	.79	.67
1857	.78	.96	.76	.67	.91	.61
1859	.85	.97	.83	.73	.79	.58
1865	.82	.94	.77	.72	.82	.58
Avg.	.82	.95	.78	.75	.80	.60
1868	.73	.86	.63	.63	.76	.48
1874	.89	.92	.82	.83	.79	.66
1880	.87	.84	.73	.83	.76	.63
Avg.	.83	.87	.73	.76	.77	.59

^aColumn (1), proportion seeking reelection; column (2), success rate; column (3), survival rate [column (1) × column (2)]; column (4), proportion seeking reelection; column (5), success rate; column (6), survival rate [column (4) × column (5)].

Source: Author's compilation from the data of Craig (1974; 1977).

.64 in 1835–65, only 57% on average of English provincial incumbents survived into the next Parliament at the elections of 1868–85. Only in the first of these elections, 1868, is the low survival rate attributable to a low proportion seeking reelection. In the last three the explanation lies in the low success rates: .719 in 1874, .693 in 1880, and .689 in 1885, these being the three lowest figures in Victoria's reign. Yet, despite these low success rates, the percentage of borough incumbents seeking reelection in these three years averaged 82.1%, more than 5 percentage points higher than the 1835–65 average.

The picture is generally similar for English county members (see Table 7.2). County MPs were on the whole more likely than their urban counterparts to seek reelection (although not when faced with a contest) and were also more likely to win reelection. But the same trends in candidate behavior visible in the boroughs are also visible in the counties: the two years in which the fewest county MPs sought reelection were 1847 and 1868. There was a one-point increase in the average percentage of rural MPs seeking reelection, from 82% in 1832–65 to 83% in 1868–80, and this increase came despite an eight-point drop in success rates, from 95%

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

to 87%. Indeed, the two worst years for county incumbents were 1868 and 1880, when only 86% and 84%, respectively, won reelection.

Although there is room for doubt about timing, it seems relatively clear that there was a firm electoral connection in English politics by the middle of the century and that this connection, if anything, became stronger toward the end of the century. Beginning with the Anti-Corn Law League in 1841, a series of pressure groups explicitly adopted a strategy of electoral pressure. More incumbents sought reelection, and this was true even at elections which in the event proved their chances to have been relatively unfavorable, and even before election costs were curbed. Finally, as seen in Chapter 6, more MPs were willing to engage in the activities, such as speaking in Parliament to provide copy for the organs of the press, which a more popular politics demanded.

MINISTERIAL AMBITION AND PARTY DISCIPLINE

...a seat in the Cabinet has become the ambition of all the prominent men in Parliament.
(A. L. Lowell, 1906)⁶

If most MPs did wish to remain in the Commons, why was this so? Since by the end of the century the backbencher had been reduced to relative impotence, and almost all positions of any consequence were in the ministry, the inference seems inescapable that politically ambitious men must increasingly have sought positions in the ministry. As these positions were at the disposal of the Prime Minister, he had a valuable resource with which to reward loyalty. There are two crucial questions: Was there a substantial (possibly growing) number of "political" members sensitive to the Premier's criteria in allocating ministerial posts? And was it understood that these posts went, generally, to those who were solid party men supportive of the leadership? The answer to each question, as regards the end of the century, appears to be yes, but the evidence is less clear for earlier in the century.

As was the case regarding the number of MPs who desired reelection, there is no survey evidence on the number of members aspiring to the ministry. An indirect handle on things may be attained by focusing on the Cabinet. How many members acquired the parliamentary experience which Cabinet ministers usually had? If only a few members acquired such experience, then perhaps a relatively well defined set of "political" members will be suggested by tenure considerations alone. Table 7.3 presents the mean tenure and the 50th, 75th, and 90th deciles of the tenure distribution for three sets of MPs defined by period of first entry into Parliament. Thus, for example, there were 329 MPs who entered

⁶Lowell (1912, vol. i: 58-59).

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 7.3. *Tenure in the House of Commons by period of entry*

Period of entry	Number entering	Mean tenure	Decile of tenure distribution		
			50th	75th	90th
1860-67	329	11.8	9	17.5	25.5
1868-84	879	11.7	9.5	15.5	29.5
1885-1910	1,786	11.6	10.5	16.0	27.0

Source: Compiled from Stenton (1976). I am grateful to Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback for allowing me to use their computerized data set of biographical information on MPs (Davis and Huttenback 1986).

Parliament for the first time in the years 1860 through 1867 (this figure includes MPs entering at by-elections in all years 1860-67, and those entering at the general election of 1865; it does not include those reentering Parliament after an absence). The average and median tenures of these 329 MPs were 11.8 and 9 years, respectively. Fully a quarter of these MPs went on to accumulate 17.5 or more years of service in the Commons. Since the average prior experience in Parliament of Cabinet ministers in 1868-1916 was between 13 and 14 years (Willson 1959: 227), it is evident that quite a few members entering in 1860-67 could not be discounted for office on the count of inexperience.

Later cohorts of entering MPs appear roughly comparable to the 1860-67 cohort. Evidently, experience in Parliament puts very little limit on the number of MPs who might have aspired to the Cabinet. The 9-10.5 years which the median member served are too many for a conclusion that he could not realistically have aimed for high office because of inexperience.

A more important limiting factor was simply the number of posts in the Cabinet. From Grey's reform ministry in 1830 to Salisbury's second ministry in 1886, the number of men in the Cabinet varied without much trend between 12 and 18. Since about half of the posts were normally filled by peers, the number of MPs in the Cabinet ranged usually between six and nine. Clearly, not many MPs could realistically hope for an appointment in the Cabinet in these years. The situation improved when the Cabinet increased in size, which it began to do in the 1890s, reaching 20 in 1902 and 1908, and usually exceeding this figure after the Great War (Alt 1975). Lowell attributed this enlargement to the increasing range of affairs with which the government dealt and to "the fact that a seat in the Cabinet has become the ambition of all the prominent men

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

in Parliament,” so that “there is constant pressure to increase [its] size” (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 58–59).

Although the Cabinet increased in size in the last decade of the century, the number of MPs in the ministry as a whole did not increase until the first decade of the next century. Whereas 34 MPs served in Peel’s short-lived 1835 ministry, only 28 served under Derby (1859), and only 33 under Disraeli (1874) and under Salisbury (1895).⁷ Typically, less than 10% of a nineteenth century Premier’s followers found office under him. The real increase in the number of MPs serving in the ministry came in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The figure reached 43 by 1910 and 60 by 1917, after which it dipped into the 50s before surging again after mid-century (Butler and Freeman 1968).

There are two inferences to be made from the increasing number of Cabinet and ministerial posts in the 1890s and early 1900s. First, one might argue, with Lowell, that the increase reflected a greater ministerial ambition among members. Second, one might infer that the larger number of positions attracted a larger crop of applicants. If either inference is valid, the value to the Prime Minister of his power of appointment would potentially have increased.

For the purposes of this work, however, the timing of this end-of-the-century appreciation in the value of the appointment power excludes it from purview. The focus here falls on the earliest observed increases in discipline – in the 1860s and 1870s – and in these decades there was no increasing trend in the size of Cabinets (Disraeli’s second was the smallest Victorian Cabinet) or ministries. Yet, although there was no multiplication of places, the power of the Cabinet was increasingly recognized in the 1860s, and the attraction of the stable supply of Cabinet posts may have become stronger or more widespread even in this earlier period. Regardless of whether the attractiveness of Cabinet and ministerial positions was increasing, the static connection between the Premier’s disposal of these seats and discipline is of interest in its own right.

Whether the power of appointment translated into increased discipline depended upon how offices were allocated, and the strategies which MPs employed to obtain them. Lowell describes two basic techniques for those seeking a ministerial post (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 58–59; Heasman 1963). An MP might adopt a safe course, voting with the party whips consistently, speaking in support of his leaders, patiently awaiting his just reward; or he might adopt a riskier course, criticizing and even attacking the leadership, cultivating a personal following among the backbenchers, and hoping to be bought off by a position in the government. To be

⁷MPs in the ministry were identified from the *Parliamentary Debates*.

Development of parliamentary parties

Table 7.4. Party support of those who later received ministerial posts

	Average party support score	N
<i>Panel I: Liberals in 1874–80</i>		
Those receiving office in 1880–85	.916	34
Those not receiving office in 1880–85	.858	193
<i>(t = 2.1)</i>		
<i>Panel II: Conservatives in 1869–73</i>		
Those receiving office in 1874–80	.875	37
Those not receiving office in 1874–80	.873	275
<i>(t = .09)</i>		

Note: The party support score is defined as the proportion of all divisions whipped by the government on which the MP supported his party. The identification of ministers was made from the first volume of Hansard's.

Source: For panel I, the party support scores are based on a sample of 74 divisions described in Table 12.1. For panel II, the support scores are based on a random sample of 16 drawn by the author, plus 25 more from the period 1869–73 (Davis and Huttenback 1986).

successful, the latter strategy required an independent power base which most private members neither had nor could realistically hope to acquire. It is plausible, therefore, that most MPs adopted a strategy closer to the former.

One simple way to test this idea is to examine opposition MPs, comparing the party support scores of those who received a ministerial appointment the next time their party was in office to the support scores of those who received no such appointment. Table 7.4 shows that the 34 MPs who both sat in the Parliament of 1874–80 and held office sometime during Gladstone's second ministry (1880–85) supported their party in 1874–80 on 91.6% of the divisions whipped by the government, as compared to a figure of 85.8% for those Liberal MPs who did not go on to receive an office under Gladstone. However, a comparable analysis for Conservatives in 1869–73 reveals little difference between those who went on to hold office under Disraeli in 1874–80 and those who did not. The average party support score of ministry-bound Conservatives in 1869–73 was 87.5 as compared to 87.3 for their backbencher colleagues.⁸

The sample of divisions on which these analyses are based could of course be larger. For now, however, the best information available on the connection between future ministerial appointment and discipline in

⁸These results hold up in a multivariate analysis controlling for the type of constituency (borough or county), whether the MP survived into the next Parliament, and various other factors.

Electoral connection and ministerial ambition

the 1870s is mixed. For this reason, and since the numbers of MPs actually securing ministerial posts were so small, the idea that increasing party cohesion can be attributed to a greater number of MPs seeking ministerial posts is best applied to a later time – the 1890s and early 1900s.

8

The Cabinet's strength: threats of resignation and dissolution

During the nineteenth century, a government had two choices when it no longer enjoyed the confidence of the House of Commons. It could resign, handing the administration over to whomever the Queen designated (her choice being restricted to at most a few major figures in the opposition), or it could ask the Queen to dissolve Parliament and issue writs for a general election. The first of these options has not been much used in the twentieth century, but the Victorian House of Commons could and did replace ministries in which it had lost confidence without suffering a dissolution. Indeed, during the early Victorian period, a government was considered to be responsible to Parliament, and if defeated early in the life of a Parliament, it was usually expected to resign and permit the formation of another Cabinet (Mackintosh 1962: 93–96). In the thirty-five years from 1832 to 1867, governments resigned as a consequence of sustaining defeats in the House of Commons on eight occasions (not counting the two resignations, in 1841 and 1859, which were direct results of general elections). Later in the century, however, the normal option for a defeated ministry shifted somewhat from resignation toward dissolution. In the fifty years after 1868, only three ministries that had lost the confidence of the House chose to resign (not counting the Gladstone ministry's attempt to resign in 1873); all the rest chose to dissolve.

Whether or not a government enjoyed the confidence of the House could be decided in a variety of ways: by a formal vote of no confidence, by a vote on a major piece of legislation, or by a series of votes of secondary importance. Each division in a session might be classified by the likely effect on the ministry and Parliament which a defeat for the government on that division would entail. For example, a particular division may have been such that a defeat for the government was certain to lead to an immediate dissolution; another may have been fairly likely

The Cabinet's strength

to lead to resignation within a few weeks; a third may have had no bearing on either dissolution or resignation; and so on.

Such considerations of dissolution and resignation have long figured in explanations of the discipline of British parties. Bagehot, writing in 1867, opined that

though the leaders of party no longer have the vast patronage of the last century with which to bribe, they can coerce by a threat far more potent than any allurement — they can dissolve. This is the secret which keeps parties together ... a solid mass of steady votes ... are maintained by fear of [the leaders] — by fear that if you vote against them, you may yourself soon not have a vote at all.

(Bagehot 1936: 125–26)

Lowell, writing forty years later, noted that “when men recognize that the defeat of a government measure means a change of Ministry, the pressure is strong to sacrifice personal opinions on the measure in question to the more important general principles for which the party stands” (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 457). The point as regards both change of ministry (with all that that implied in terms of patronage, policy, and ministerial place) and dissolution (with all that that implied in terms of expense and risk of defeat) is that the merits of particular questions could be swamped by larger issues, and backbenchers had to take heed of this. The party leadership had also to recognize its precarious tenure of office: “Since the Cabinet may be overturned at any moment ... it must try to keep its followers constantly in hand; and since every defeat, however trivial, even if not fatal, is damaging, it must try to prevent any hostile votes. ... Thus from the side both of the private member and the responsible Minister there is a pressure in the parliamentary system towards more strict party voting” (Lowell 1912, vol. ii: 84).

How important was the fear of dissolution and resignation to the development of party discipline in the nineteenth century? The dissolution of Parliament had always been possible, and ministries had been resigning en masse since the eighteenth century. The new factor was the linkage of dissolution and resignation to legislation. Prior to 1830, no ministry had ever resigned on a question of legislation (Woodward 1939: 23). When the legislative power of the Cabinet grew, however, governments began to fall on legislative questions too. Indeed, the expectation that all major pieces of legislation would emanate from the Cabinet, the development of which was traced in Chapter 6, went hand in hand with the expectation that the government would resign or dissolve upon sustaining an important legislative defeat. Even in the early part of the century, ministers had let it be known that they would resign, or possibly seek a dissolution, if defeated on certain important motions. These threats — so they were interpreted and called by contemporaries — were both un-

Development of parliamentary parties

popular and rare for some time after 1832. In 1847, “men complained of the unreasonable conduct of the Ministers because they had twice in six months made a major question a matter of confidence” (Mackintosh 1962: 85). And the leaders seemed disposed to make – or at least advocate – sparing use of such threats. Peel noted that “menaces of resignation if the House of Commons do not adopt certain measures are very unpalatable, and I think they should be reserved for very rare and very important occasions” (Jennings 1951: 442). By the 1860s, the use of threats of resignation and dissolution had apparently picked up. The fates of both the Liberal Reform Bill in 1866 and of Disraeli’s Reform Bill in 1867 seem to have been significantly affected by the fear of dissolution among Liberal backbenchers (Smith 1966: 88, 116–17, 167, 181); and Gladstone’s use of threats of confidence in the Parliament of 1868–74 startled one contemporary, who asserted that “if the number of times Mr. Gladstone declared that he should regard the current proceedings as a vote of want of confidence in Her Majesty’s Ministers could be ascertained and summed up the result would be astounding” (Lucy n.d.: 50). Unfortunately, there is no easy or precise way to ascertain and sum up even explicit threats of resignation, so the precise trends are still unknown. Nonetheless, the general tendency was clearly toward an increasing recognition on the part of MPs that a fairly wide range of issues might affect the ministry’s decision whether or not to stay in office. By 1886, Lord Salisbury considered *limiting* his government’s sphere of responsibility: “We will be responsible for the guidance of Parliament only on the questions which we ourselves submit to it” (Jennings 1951: 459). Although Salisbury was not suggesting that every bill introduced by his government would be by itself a stand-or-fall issue, the extension and recognition of responsibility is clear. MacDonald was more precise in 1924 as to what the questions of confidence would be: “The Labour government will go out if it is defeated upon substantial issues, issues of principle, issues which really matter” (Jennings 1951: 459). In general, twentieth century governments have tended to treat most important questions as questions of confidence.

The trends in the nineteenth century as regards matters of confidence can thus be summed up as follows: more and more questions were treated as questions of confidence, and the expected consequence of a loss of confidence was, increasingly, a dissolution. What impact did these trends have on the development of party discipline?

The most obvious approach to studying the impact of threats of confidence is to identify motions which the government had clearly identified as vital to its continuance in office and see if cohesion was higher than on otherwise similar motions which the government had not decided to take a stand on. The work of Bylsma (1977) and of Beales (1967) shows

The Cabinet's strength

that discipline was indeed very high on major matters of confidence during the 1850s. Unfortunately, however, comparable studies do not exist for other periods. And there is no easy and systematic way in which to identify all motions on which the government had staked its reputation in any given session. The only entirely explicit and "guaranteed" threat of dissolution was Derby's in 1858, when he obtained royal permission beforehand to announce that if the motion of censure over Ellenborough's despatch were carried, he would go to the country. F. B. Smith speaks of Gladstone on one occasion as "intimating" that the government "might not accept an adverse vote" (Smith 1966: 110). And that differences of opinion could arise as to whether or not a threat had been made is shown by the following exchange in the House of Commons:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer had threatened the House with a dissolution. ["No, no!" from the Treasury Bench.] Well, what was the meaning of the passage about cutting away the bridges and burning the boats? He had understood that – and he ventured to think it had been so understood by the public – as a threat of dissolution. ["No!" from the Treasury Bench.] He was glad to hear it was not so – he was glad to have been the humble instrument of clearing up the mystery.¹

Obviously, not all threats of confidence were crystal clear.

An alternative method of assessing the importance of threats of confidence can be devised which does not require the identification of which divisions were, and by how much, under the gun. It will help first to note that the effects of a threatened resignation and of a threatened dissolution were somewhat different. This was recognized by the Liberal chief whip, Brand, when he advised Gladstone to treat Grosvenor's amendment as a matter of confidence, but emphasized that the threat should be one of resignation rather than dissolution (Smith 1966: 88).

How an MP evaluated a possible resignation depended chiefly on the relative attractiveness of having his, rather than the other party's, leaders in office. This, in turn, depended on such considerations as how powerful the Cabinet was as an institution, whether the MP held or hoped for ministerial position, and how greatly he preferred the likely policy of his own leaders to the likely policy of the other party's leaders.

How an MP evaluated a possible dissolution, on the other hand, might have been rather different. A dissolution, of course, since it entailed a general election, might so alter the House of Commons that the ministry which had called for the election could not continue in office. Dissolutions thus entailed the possibility of resignation, and the reaction of MPs to possible dissolutions should have been affected by the same factors listed in the previous paragraph. But dissolutions also, and more immediately, entailed electoral expense and the risk of defeat. This gave the threat or

¹*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, clxxxii, 2143.

Development of parliamentary parties

possibility of a dissolution added zest. And indeed, although Victorian MPs did sometimes vote to oust ministries, they were probably more reluctant to vote for a dissolution; Richard Cobden declared that he

had never been able to discover what was the proper moment, according to members of Parliament, for a dissolution. He had heard them say they were ready to vote for everything else, but he had never heard them say they were ready to vote for that. (Bagehot 1936: 126)

Since the usual procedure was increasingly for defeated governments to request a dissolution rather than to resign, we shall focus on dissolutions in the remainder of this chapter. The question is whether or not an increasing fear of dissolution was the key to the increasing discipline of the mid-Victorian parties.

Before accepting any such view, one should note that the impact of dissolution on discipline has not gone unchallenged – even when the argument is applied only to the twentieth century Parliament. The most frequent objection is that threats of dissolution cannot explain the cohesion of the opposition. Jackson, for example, asserts that “since only the government can dissolve Parliament, opposition leaders cannot use this threat with their backbenchers. Therefore, nearly half the MPs cannot be controlled by the threat of dissolution of Parliament” (Jackson 1968: 10). Other criticisms are that even the government, which can threaten dissolution, has neither the incentive (because ministers stand to lose more by a dissolution than backbenchers) nor the “follow-through” (because governments rarely use elections to purge their ranks of dissidents) to make dissolution an effective tool (Epstein 1956: 364; Andrews 1960; Jackson 1968: 11). These criticisms clearly view dissolution as an explicit threat made by the ministry. Although we shall continue to speak of “threats,” we shall understand by this more than explicit admonitions. Whenever an MP perceived that the defeat of the government on a motion had some probability of producing or hastening a dissolution, this threat should have affected his decision, whether or not ministers had explicitly menaced the House. It is common knowledge in the twentieth century that substantial amendments to Her Majesty’s Most Gracious Speech are tantamount to votes of no confidence, and no reminder of impending dissolution need be made by the government. Indeed, no overt threat of dissolution has occurred since 1922, yet the occurrence of votes with the potential for causing dissolution has been frequent (Mackintosh 1962: 498). It would appear much more fruitful, therefore, to focus on the response of MPs to the pressure of a perceived dissolution, rather than to confine analysis to dissolution as an explicit threat.

A dissolution meant a general election, and whether and how much an MP wished to avoid this presumably depended on the time remaining

The Cabinet's strength

to the natural end of Parliament and on his expectations of electoral victory and cost. The cost of an election was undoubtedly something that MPs always wished to avoid, and the earlier in a Parliament that a dissolution was threatened, the greater the value in deferred cost that might be secured by ensuring that the threat was not carried out. Thus, one would expect threats of dissolution to be decreasingly effective as a Parliament toiled toward its statutory end. Since the only way an MP could, by private action, decrease the probability of a dissolution was to vote for the government (or to abstain, if a member of the opposition), one would also expect that the opposition's discipline and attendance might be lower than the government's, since opposition members were exposed to a pressure favoring the government.

However, there were two other consequences of dissolutions which may alter these relationships: dissolutions involved risks of both personal defeat and party defeat. When MPs felt that an immediate general election would give them or their party a poor chance of reelection, they naturally wished to avoid a dissolution on this count as well as on the count of cost. The Liberal whips in 1867 reported that their backbenchers were afraid to oppose the second reading of Disraeli's Reform Bill (as Gladstone wished to do), since the government would dissolve if beaten, and they dared not face their constituents after having defeated an extension of the suffrage (Smith 1966: 167). T. D. Acland wrote to his wife explaining that Gladstone was hampered by the Radicals, the Whigs, and "a large body who care for nothing except to avoid a dissolution" (Smith 1966: 181). On the other hand, when MPs felt that an immediate dissolution would give them or their party a good chance at reelection, they might actually seek it, even if they were currently in office and Parliament had some years to go. For example, in 1878, after Lord Beaconsfield's triumphant return from Berlin, the Conservative government considered a dissolution even though they had suffered no setback and the Parliament had over two years remaining (Mackintosh 1962: 178–79). Again, in 1900, Conservatives were generally happy to fight an election on the Boer War, even though this meant a dissolution two years earlier than legally necessary. Thus, when electoral conditions were favorable enough, the value of deferred costs could be outweighed by the high probability of reelection, and MPs might, on balance, actually favor a dissolution.

In general, however, it seems safe to make the following assumptions. Every MP wished to postpone dissolutions insofar as doing so deferred the costs of election and the risk of personal defeat. Government MPs wished to avoid dissolutions also because of the risk of party defeat, while opposition MPs viewed elections positively to the extent that they might produce a new ministry. If the entire set of whipped divisions taken in a given Parliament is considered, therefore, and if the very strong

Development of parliamentary parties

assumption is made that no other factor affecting discipline covaried with time, then one would expect two specific patterns of behavior if dissolution was of preeminent importance to the government in keeping its troops in line. First, majority party cohesion should decrease with time, since the potency of the (implicit or explicit) threat of dissolution decreases with time. Second, for the same reason, minority cohesion should increase with time.

In order to give a fair test to these predictions, divisions from several Parliaments would need to be examined. Unfortunately, for the period of interest (viz., the 1860s and after), the necessary data rarely exist in a form suitable for analysis. The only Parliament for which we have a reasonable number of machine-readable divisions for several sessions is that of 1874–80, which may have been unusual because of the Berlin Conference. In this Parliament, the correlations of time with majority cohesion and minority cohesion were both small and insignificant, the latter being of the wrong sign. If one looks at the correlation between time *within a session* (for those sessions studied by Lowell) and the cohesion of the government and opposition parties, one finds that the relationship is more often than not of the wrong sign.²

Possibly these negative results simply reflect a violation of the very stringent assumption that no other factor affecting discipline changed over time. Party leaders, for example, may have brought their most controversial measures forward in the early or middle years of a Parliament; indeed, if they believed that threats of dissolution were more efficacious earlier in a Parliament, they may have had an incentive to do so. Nonetheless, one might doubt whether a better test of the disciplinary impact of dissolution would reveal as strong a result as, say, Bagehot or Jennings (1939) would have it. For an MP faced with a threat of dissolution – even an explicit and guaranteed threat such as Lord Derby's in 1858 – should not have acted as if his vote was certain to make the difference between a dissolution and a continuation of Parliament – which seems to be the implicit assumption of Bagehot and Jennings. In the case where the government would dissolve if and only if defeated, a single MP's vote would be decisive only if the division was decided by exactly one vote (or was tied); in all other situations, the MP's vote would not matter in the sense that he could vote either way and the Parliament would still dissolve, or not, as the case might be. Thus, the threat or possibility of a dissolution should have been discounted by MPs. Dissolution was a

²The correlation of time within a session with majority cohesion and with minority cohesion was, in 1836, .13 and -.06; in 1850, -.22 and .08; in 1860, -.19 and .11; in 1871, .06 and -.14; in 1881, .16 and -.16; in 1894, -.25 and .08; and in 1899, .07 and -.14. Cohesion and attendance were calculated for whipped divisions only. Time was proxied by the sequence number of the division in the given session.

The Cabinet's strength

collective threat, not an individual threat, and the usual incentives to "free ride" should have existed. For example, if an MP's constituents wanted him to vote against the government, and he believed that he would incur some increased risk of defeat at the next election if he did not, then he should have been tempted to vote his constituency, hoping that *others* would support the government in sufficient numbers to prevent a dissolution.

It is difficult at this point to draw any confident conclusions about the importance of dissolution to the development of party discipline. There is certainly case-study evidence that dissolution played an important role at least some of the time: chiefly on important matters that were closely fought. There is also evidence that the number of issues that the government treated as matters of confidence increased during and after the 1860s. Moreover, Schwarz has recently argued that the recurrence of indiscipline in the House of Commons in the 1970s followed, at least in the Labour party, a weakening of the "parliamentary rule," i.e., "the understanding that, following a defeat of the government on the floor on an important issue, the government may well resign" (Schwarz 1980: 33). Indeed, Schwarz notes that the number of defeats sustained by governments in the 1974–78 period (39) was not far short of the four-year average for the period 1851–67 (44) (Schwarz 1980: 27).

Yet, although it is highly suggestive that the parliamentary rule should have gained and lost prominence when it did, it is hard to accept variations in the strength of this convention as a full explanation of the trends in parliamentary discipline. Threats of dissolution, in addition to being collective rather than personal in nature, are clearly endogenous. If one asks why the Labour government in the 1970s decided to relax the parliamentary rule, the answer seems to be that it could no longer count on the solid support of its followers: for if it could, why relax the rule? Factors other than dissolution must have already begun to undermine party unity, and the public loosening of the parliamentary rule may well have been as much a response to as a cause of declining cohesiveness. The question then becomes, Precisely what other things might have changed in order to undermine discipline? And, in the nineteenth century, the question is, What other things might have changed to bolster discipline? The answers to these questions may lie in the electoral arena.

PART III

The electorate

9

*The development of
a party-oriented electorate*

Part II of this book dealt chiefly with the development of party discipline in the House of Commons in the 1860s and 1870s. No obviously satisfactory explanation of this development has been found. The traditional argument, due to Ostrogorski, that the establishment of local party associations after the second Reform Act led directly to increased discipline does not hold water for the 1870s (Chapter 5). The increasing number and complexity of divisions in which MPs participated probably had only a marginal impact by this decade (Chapter 6). The desire for ministerial position, while no doubt important later in the century, probably affected only a relatively small proportion of MPs in the 1870s, simply because of the paucity of government posts. Moreover, the prospect of the reward of office did not always lead to higher discipline (Chapter 7). The increasing tendency of governments to threaten the House with dissolution, while the most important factor identified thus far, is extremely difficult to assess (Chapter 8).

In this part of the book, attention turns from an exclusive concentration on the voting behavior of MPs to include the voting behavior of ordinary electors. The main focus will fall upon three fairly well defined and narrow questions: (1) When did English voters begin to vote for parties rather than men? (2) Why did they do so? (3) What were the consequences?

In answering these questions, it is necessary first to clarify what is meant by "voting for parties rather than men." The staunch declaration of one Englishman in 1951 that he would "vote for a pig if the party put one up" (Butler 1952: 173) can serve as an indication. While this quotation may exaggerate the extent to which English voters are willing to ignore the personal characteristics and policy beliefs of their MPs, it certainly jibes with the textbook picture of twentieth century British voters. Citizens of the United Kingdom can register a preference for the executive only through their votes for the House of Commons. Since the

The electorate

Cabinet is the effective locus of power and since individual MPs have relatively few political resources – scant control over campaign finances, little institutional power in Parliament, a small staff – voters naturally tend to use their votes chiefly as vehicles to affect party control of the executive. Consequently, voting decisions are based primarily upon the partisan affiliations of the candidates, rather than upon their personal policy beliefs or characteristics; voters are party-oriented rather than candidate-oriented.

Although there is a consensus that British voters have been and are party-oriented in this sense, there is no consensus on when they became so. It is natural to look for an answer by examining the historical development of the conditions which encourage voters to view their vote as a means to control the executive. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the power of the Cabinet over legislation had not yet developed, and private members of Parliament still played important roles in the policy process. Moreover, individual MPs controlled their own campaign finances and organization. All of this had changed by the twentieth century, and one might suppose that the development of a party-oriented electorate followed the changes. This and the following chapter will argue that the crucial change was the decline in the parliamentary stature of the individual MP. Indeed, it will be shown that no real change in electoral finance or organization occurred until *after* the electorate had become predominantly party-oriented.

The basis of such conclusions is a lengthy time series of electoral statistics which directly reflect the degree to which English voters behaved in a party-oriented fashion. These statistics pertain to elections held in the double-member districts which once dominated the English electoral system, and cover the century from 1818 to 1918. Electors in double-member districts had two votes, and one obvious measure of the degree to which they based their electoral choice chiefly on partisan preference is the percentage of electors who split their votes between the two major parties, voting both for a Conservative and for a Liberal. This percentage (and another which also taps the extent of party-oriented voting) has been calculated for over one thousand election contests held at general elections between 1818 and 1918. The trends in these percentages reveal a clear answer to the first of the narrow questions posed above: there is a permanent and large reduction in the split voting rate in the period 1857–68. While there is some continued downward trend in split voting in the period after 1868, it is small relative to the previous decline. The tendency of English voters to vote for parties rather than for men appears to be a permanent feature of English politics from 1868 onward.

The data presented in this chapter are intriguing also for the light they cast on the mutual impact that party-oriented voters and partisan MPs

Development of a party-oriented electorate

had on one another. The broad outline of changes in party voting in the electorate is remarkably similar to the outline of changes in party voting in the legislature. As intra-party unity in the Commons increased after 1835 (Close 1969), non-partisan voting rates fell. Leading into the Parliament of 1841–47, which Aydelotte (1962–63) shows to have been highly partisan, the election of 1841 registered the lowest split voting rate of all general elections held under the terms of the first Reform Act. After the dispute over the Corn Laws shattered the Conservative party, a period of low party discipline both in Parliament and in the constituencies followed, lasting well into the 1850s. Party voting resurfaced decisively in the electorate after the election of 1857, achieving previously unmatched levels by 1868. A resurgence in party discipline in Parliament was visible by 1871, and unprecedented levels were achieved by the 1874–80 Parliament.

The correlation at the aggregate level between legislative and electoral party voting naturally prompts the question of why such a correlation exists. Chapter 12 shows that there was a constituency-by-constituency relationship: the more split votes an MP received when elected, the more often he dissented from his party's position in Parliament. The decline in split voting in the electorate, then, suggests an electoral side to the development of party discipline in Parliament. This suggestion is pursued in Chapters 11 and 12.

In the next section, a brief review of previous work relevant to the question of when English voters became party-oriented is given. In the second and third sections the data are described, and the basic pattern of evidence is presented in the fourth section. Why voters began to vote for parties rather than men is investigated in the following chapter.

PARTY-ORIENTED VOTERS

By 1963, R. T. McKenzie could write that “most observers are now fairly firmly agreed that a particular candidate, whatever his merits, is not likely to add or subtract more than about 500–1,000 votes to the total his party would win, regardless of who had been nominated” (McKenzie 1963: 5). A very similar judgment was given by Ivor Jennings twenty years earlier: “In general, the electors vote not for a candidate but for a party. A bad candidate may lose a few hundred votes and a good candidate may gain a few hundred” (Jennings 1939: 27). Estimates of the personal vote have increased for recent elections, but still remain well below those given for U.S. Congressmen (Butler and Kavanagh 1980: 407–10; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1984).

Surprisingly, however, the question of when voters began to vote for parties rather than candidates has not been the subject of much sustained

The electorate

quantitative research. There appear to be three different answers given in the historical literature. On the one hand, Alan Beattie (1970: 145) argues that “neither the fact of party voting nor its widespread acceptance as the normal state of affairs was established before the 1880s.” Apparently agreeing with this position, Kenneth Wald, in his recent study of class- and religion-based voting, writes that “during the period of the third Reform Act, elections acquired their decisive modern function as the major mechanism linking the actions of the rulers with the wishes of the ruled.... As the concept of the popular mandate gained legitimacy, elections were treated as referenda upon current issues, and the distribution of the vote was taken as a measure of public reaction to party policy” (Wald 1983: 6–7).

A second perspective on the influence of party in electoral voting sees it first becoming significant after 1867. Writing of the period between the second and third Reform Acts, E. J. Feuchtwanger asserts that “members of Parliament and their leading supporters now saw public opinion swayed predominantly by national issues and by the manner in which the national leaders handled these issues” (Feuchtwanger 1968: 218). Similarly, J. P. Mackintosh writes that electors after the second Reform Act “voted for a party and a programme” (Mackintosh 1962: 162).

Yet a third, and very strongly stated, opinion on the development of partisan attachments in the electorate is offered by John Vincent. According to Vincent, the explosive growth in the number of newspapers after the removal of the Stamp Tax in 1855, and the highly partisan propaganda to which the new press exposed their readers, caused a rapid and “massive development of party loyalties throughout the country” in the 1860s (Vincent 1966: 82).

Although these answers are clearly at variance with one another, not much progress has been made in arbitrating between them. In part, this is because all three answers are based largely on local evidence which is difficult to compare across time. Of the authors cited above, only Wald makes much reference to electoral statistics, and he is interested in a different (although related) topic. Recent quantitative work on Victorian electoral behavior, while pointing in the direction of a more definitive answer, has not yet gone far enough.

This more recent and quantitative work can be divided into two streams based on the primary electoral document used. The most detailed analyses are offered by those scholars using poll books. Before the establishment of secret voting by the Ballot Act of 1872, voting at parliamentary elections was public and *viva voce*, and the decision of each elector was often recorded, together with his name, in documents known as poll books. Using techniques of nominal record linkage, scholars have recently begun to examine the voting behavior of individual electors over a series of

Development of a party-oriented electorate

elections (Drake 1971; Mitchell 1976; Mitchell and Cornford 1977). While this work is extremely useful and obviously bears directly on the question of whether voters tended to vote consistently for the same party, thus far there are too few studies to support generalizations about the country-wide level of party voting across time.

A second stream of quantitative work on Victorian electoral behavior has used documentary evidence available for the double-member districts, which predominated before 1885. Using this evidence, T. J. Nossiter was able to calculate the rate at which Victorian voters in 25 northern and 12 southern double-member boroughs split their votes between the parties. Interestingly, Nossiter found no tendency for voters to split their votes less frequently in the 1860s, which would certainly count against Vincent's thesis (Nossiter 1975: 178). However, J. C. Mitchell's similar study of 32 "frequently contested" boroughs did find a "secular trend toward firmer party voting over time" and would lend more support to Vincent's contentions (Mitchell 1976: 121). Unfortunately, both Nossiter and Mitchell halted their investigations with the election of 1868, so that not only is it difficult to gauge the national trend of party voting in the 1860s, given that the evidence is in dispute, but no statement at all is possible about later years. So the question remains: When did party voting take hold in the electorate?

The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer to that question based on an analysis of split voting (and what we refer to as "non-partisan plumping") in over a thousand election contests held in 198 double-member constituencies in the period 1818–1918. The next section begins the analysis with a discussion of voting and voting statistics in double-member districts.

DOUBLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS

Virtually all English constituencies were double-member before the passage of the first Reform Act, with only five being single-member and two multi-member. In the period between the first and second Reform Acts, 53 English constituencies (21%) returned one member, 193 (76%) returned two members, and 8 (3%) returned three or four members. After 1867, the number of English double-member districts fell to 163, or 61% of all English constituencies. Only 24 double-member districts remained after the massive redistricting connected with the third Reform Act.

Electors in the double-member districts had two votes, which they could cast in any manner they wished, short of giving both votes to the same candidate. Thus, in a three-candidate contest, such as that held at the 1874 general election in Pontefract among the Right Honourable H. C. E. Childers (a Liberal), Samuel Waterhouse (a Conservative), and

The electorate

Table 9.1. *Vote count for election of 1874 in Pontefract*

Candidate	Party	Plumpers	Total votes
Rt. Hon. H. C. E. Childers	Liberal	699	934
Major Samuel Waterhouse	Conservative	60	861
Viscount Pollington	Conservative	37	709
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		796	
Candidate pair	Double votes		
Childers/Waterhouse	182		
Childers/Pollington	53		
Waterhouse/Pollington	619		
	<hr/>		
	854		

Note: Total persons voting = 1,650.

Viscount Pollington (also a Conservative), there were six legal patterns of votes. Electors could vote for Childers and Waterhouse, or for Childers and Pollington, or for Waterhouse and Pollington (these three being all the possible "double" votes, in contemporary parlance), or they could vote for Childers alone, or for Waterhouse alone, or for Pollington alone (these being all the "single" votes or "plumpers"). As it turned out – and this was typical – the electors of Pontefract employed all six legal patterns of votes in 1874, as can be seen in Table 9.1, which shows the number of vote patterns of each kind cast in that election. Elections in Victorian England (even those after the secret ballot had been introduced in 1872) were often documented in the format of Table 9.1 in the newspapers or at the backs of poll books, and it is on these invaluable electoral records ("vote counts") that the analysis in this chapter is based.

Two basic statistics are easily computed from vote counts, both tapping the degree to which voters based their electoral decisions on their attitudes toward the parties. The most obvious of these statistics is the "split voting rate," equal to the percentage of electors who cast votes for candidates of different parties. In Pontefract, 182 voters cast Childers/Waterhouse and 53 cast Childers/Pollington double votes, these amounting to 14.2% of the total voters. Hence, the split voting rate for this contest is 14.2%.

Another simple statistic calculable from vote counts, the "non-partisan plumping rate," is the percentage of electors who cast a plumper for a candidate when another candidate of the same party was available. For example, in Pontefract, 60 voters cast single votes for Waterhouse, thereby snubbing the other Conservative, Pollington. As these voters were

Development of a party-oriented electorate

distinguishing between members of the same party, they evidently employed criteria other than partisan preference.¹

Both the split voting (SV) and non-partisan plumping (NPP) rates (or similar measures) have been employed by various scholars in previous studies (e.g., Miller 1971; Nossiter 1975; Speck and Gray 1975; Mitchell 1976; Hanham 1978; Phillips 1982). However, for Victorian elections, the only major investigations are those of Nossiter and Mitchell mentioned in the previous section, and some limitations of these studies should be noted. First, both scholars deal only with borough contests – in Nossiter's case, those contests documented in Bean (1890), which he supplements with some southern borough contests for comparison; and in Mitchell's case, those contests held in 32 “frequently contested” boroughs. Second, both studies cover only the 1832–68 period (although Mitchell does have a few figures for 1874 and 1880). The data set collected for this chapter was intended to contain all available vote counts – whether for county or borough contests – in the period 1832–1918. While falling a bit short of that ideal, the sample is large enough to permit generalizations about nation-wide trends in English voting behavior after 1832 with some confidence. A smaller sample covering the period 1818–31 is included for comparison.

THE DATA

In total, the data set contains 1,085 vote counts from the twenty-five general elections held between 1818 and 1918.² The yearly distribution

¹The term “non-partisan plumper” is in some respects rather misleading, and indeed I have been advised not to use it. The problem is that one of the usual denotations of “partisan” is “a militant supporter of a party, cause, faction, person or idea.” Yet what I call “non-partisan” plumpers were often cast by persons whom one might describe as partisans in the above sense. The sense in which I use the term here is closer to that indicated in the phrase “partisan politics.” A plumper is non-partisan if the person casting it could have used his other vote to support another candidate of the same party, but did not, indicating the use of criteria other than the party label.

²Five major sources were used to collect these ballot counts: (1) Smith (1973) for the period 1832–47; (2) Bean (1890) for the six northern counties in 1832–80; (3) the collections of poll books in the Institute of Historical Research (University of London), the Guildhall Library (City of London), and the British Library for the period 1832–68; (4) the collection of newspapers at the Colindale Annex of the British Library for the period 1868–80; (5) Craig (1974) for the period 1885–1910. Approximately 15% of the ballot counts in the data set have been “reconstructed.” That is, the original source document gave only the plumpers (or some other partial information), from which it was possible to infer the rest of the information based on certain mathematical relationships holding between the aggregate totals and ballot count information. The method used has been described in Mitchell (1976: 112). All ballot counts have been checked for internal consistency. That is, each candidate's

The electorate

of these is given in Table 9.2. As can be seen, the number of vote counts is considerably greater on average for the twelve elections held between 1832 and 1880 (73.5) than for the eight elections held afterward (15.4) or the five elections held before (16.0). The size of the yearly subsamples can be gauged relative to a number of standards. First, one can compare the number of vote counts actually collected to the number which might possibly have been collected. This latter number is equal simply to the number of double-member constituencies which were contested; for if a constituency was not contested – that is, if there were no more candidates seeking office than there were seats to be had – no poll of the voters was taken at all, and hence, of course, no record of their votes was possible. By this standard, the sample after 1832 is fairly large. In the period 1832–80, generally over 50%, and on average over 60%, of the contested double-member constituencies in any given year are represented in the yearly subsample; after 1885, 77% of the contested double-member constituencies are represented in the average year. Before 1832, on the other hand, an average of only 21% of double-member contests are documented in the yearly subsamples.

A second consideration in assessing the size of the sample is the number of voters whose behavior is summarized in the data. For each year after 1832 the total number of persons who voted in constituencies for which a vote count exists is given in column 3 of Table 9.2, and this figure is expressed as a percentage of all voters, and of all registered electors, in columns 4 and 5. The average number of persons represented in the sample in any given year between 1832 and 1910 is 237,725. Before 1885, the yearly subsamples constitute on average 31.9% of the total English voting population, and 20.7% of the total registered population (where both these populations refer to the whole of England, not just to English double-member districts). After 1885, the corresponding figures are much lower, 6.8% and 4.8%, respectively.

Although the sample is not random, between 1832 and 1880 it is broadly representative of the target population, all regions of the country having substantial representation in each yearly subsample. The only obvious bias is a rather mild tendency for the borough population to be oversampled relative to the county population. As seen in Table 9.3, which refers to a subsample to be explained presently, about 55% of all contested boroughs were sampled on average (i.e., had ballot counts),

total number of votes has been calculated by adding up his plumpers and double votes, and this figure has been compared to the totals given in the source document (if available) or to the official returns. In roughly 80% of the cases, the two figures agree exactly. In only 13 ballot counts do the figures disagree by more than 3%, and these have been excluded from analysis.

Development of a party-oriented electorate

Table 9.2. Available vote counts, 1818–1910

Year	Number of contests with vote counts	Percentage of all double-member contests ^a	Number of electors involved	As percentage of all English voters ^b	Percentage of all registered electors ^c
1818	13	15	23,157	— ^d	—
1820	7	10	11,953	—	—
1826	19	23	25,653	—	—
1830	20	26	40,500	—	—
1831	21	32	24,109	—	—
1832	102	68	231,768	51	38
1835	90	73	140,585	37	22
1837	89	64	189,291	37	26
1841	84	77	155,778	37	20
1847	80	79	140,029	36	17
1852	68	55	129,702	24	15
1857	52	49	112,880	25	13
1859	53	54	96,762	22	11
1865	63	52	150,402	26	16
1868	60	47	313,824	22	17
1874	55	47	439,687	29	21
1880	86	61	741,540	37	32
1885	17	85	214,491	6	5
1886	15	79	177,566	8	4
1892	14	74	205,780	6	5
1895	15	75	218,817	7	5
1900	14	82	218,559	8	4
1906	15	68	270,992	6	5
1910 (Jan.)	16	73	299,377	6	5
1910 (Dec.)	17	81	306,675	7	5

^aColumn 2 gives the figures in column 1 as percentages of the number of double-member constituencies which were contested. Percentages for the first four years are based on Mitchell's figures for the total number of contests in English constituencies, double-member or not (Mitchell 1967: 116).

^bColumn 4 gives the figures in column 3 as percentages of the estimated numbers of voters in all English constituencies (both single- and multi-member). Before 1885, the estimated number of voters is arrived at by taking no. contested constituencies / no. constituencies × no. registered electors. Because county constituencies (which were larger) tended to be more often uncontested, and because we do not take account of turnout (essentially assuming that it was 100%), the estimated numbers of voters for years before 1885 should be overestimates, and hence the size of the sample relative to the population of voters is probably understated. Exact figures are available for the number of voters after 1885.

^cColumn 5 gives the figures in column 3 as percentages of the total registered electorate in England (not confined to the electorate in double-member districts).

^dDash indicates data not available.

Table 9.3. *Usable vote counts, 1818–1910*

Year	Number of vote counts in						Total number of voters	Percentage of all English voters
	Boroughs	%	Counties	%	All constituencies	%		
1818	8	— ^a	5	—	13	15	23,157	—
1820	5	—	2	—	7	10	11,953	—
1826	16	—	3	—	19	23	25,653	—
1830	15	—	5	—	20	26	40,500	—
1831	16	—	5	—	21	32	24,109	—
1832	46	40	30	79	76	50	179,228	40
1835	71	67	10	56	81	66	126,024	33
1837	72	66	16	53	88	63	188,199	37
1841	73	79	9	50	82	74	153,173	36
1847	58	66	6	46	64	63	104,310	27
1852	49	48	6	29	55	44	93,697	17
1857	38	43	6	33	44	42	100,587	22
1859	43	51	4	30	47	48	83,183	19
1865	50	51	11	50	61	50	149,958	26
1868	28	35	23	50	51	40	282,532	20
1874	35	41	18	56	53	45	407,669	26
1880	50	58	34	63	84	60	704,890	35
1885	15	75	0	—	15	75	179,486	5
1886	15	79	0	—	15	79	177,566	8
1892	14	74	0	—	14	74	205,780	6
1895	12	60	0	—	12	60	171,034	6
1900	12	71	0	—	12	71	184,864	7
1906	15	68	0	—	15	68	270,992	6
1910 (Jan.)	16	73	0	—	16	73	299,377	6
1910 (Dec.)	17	81	0	—	17	81	306,975	7

^a Data not available.

Development of a party-oriented electorate

while only about 47% of contested counties were sampled.³ The explanation for this seems to be that poll books and vote counts were more difficult to compile for larger constituencies.

After 1885, constituencies in the sample are no longer representative of English constituencies generally, since only 23 provincial boroughs (ignoring London, for which no data survive) remained as double-member districts after the third Reform Act. These provincial boroughs were geographically dispersed, however, including, for example, Bath, Blackburn, Derby, Ipswich, Portsmouth, and York, and they are not unrepresentative, at least before 1885: if average SV and NPP rates for these boroughs are computed for each general election to 1880, these figures correlate at .92 with the averages based on the full sample.

Similar statements can be made about the pre-1832 subsample. Although only a relative handful of constituencies are sampled each year, they tend to be fairly dispersed geographically and are not unrepresentative in the sense that, after 1832, they behave similarly to the sample as a whole.

For the most part, the data will be interpreted here as a sample of voters from the entire English voting population, rather than as a sample of double-member election contests from the population of all contests, on the reasoning that what is of interest is nation-wide trends in individual voting behavior. Practically speaking, all this means is that instead of computing SV and NPP rates for each constituency, and then taking the simple average of these figures as an indication of national voting behavior, a weighted average of the constituency figures (where the weights are the total numbers of voters) will be used. This is equivalent to pooling all the voters in each yearly subsample and computing the statistics directly, as if the whole subsample were one constituency. None of the conclusions reached in the text depends on the choice of weighted rather than simple averages.

Since pooling all voters into a national sample could hide significant differences in voting behavior between county and borough electorates, I have computed SV and NPP rates for counties and boroughs separately. The distinction between large and small boroughs and the possibility of regional variation have also been investigated and are discussed later.

For present purposes, another factor that merits attention is the type of election contests contained in the yearly subsamples. For example, a contest between a Conservative, a Liberal, and a Chartist must by definition have a zero NPP rate and will probably have a high SV rate. But it is unlikely that the split votes cast in such a contest reflect clearly “non-

³Of course, since there were fewer counties than boroughs, and since counties were contested far less frequently than boroughs, the *number* of ballot counts in counties is much less than the number in boroughs.

The electorate

partisan” motivations. Hence, such three-way contests, and indeed, any contests involving more than two parties (which are rare in any event), will be excluded from analysis. Similarly, contests between three Liberals must by definition have a zero SV rate and will probably have a high NPP rate. But once again, it seems inappropriate to consider plumpers cast in such an election as indications of non-partisan motivations. Hence, any contest with more than two candidates of any party (also a rarity) will be excluded from analysis.

These exclusions – which are not crucial to any of the conclusions that follow – mean that only two kinds of contests will be considered in the tables that follow: those with two candidates of one party and a lone member of another (two-against-one contests), and those involving a pair of candidates from each of two parties (two-against-two contests).⁴ These contest types were by far the most frequent, together accounting for 901 contests, or 89.7% of the full sample, after 1832. Before 1832, vote counts were collected only for two-against-one and two-against-two contests, so that all 80 pre-1832 contests appear in the tables to come. The size of the post-1832 data set can be gauged from the figures in Table 9.3, which also gives a breakdown of the information on vote counts for boroughs and counties separately. On average, the yearly subsamples before 1885 represent 28.2% of the total English voting population. After 1885, this average falls to 6.4%.

A distinction between two-against-one and two-against-two contests should be noted. One reason suggested by contemporaries for split voting in two-against-one contests was that the followers of the party putting up only one candidate had an incentive to use their second votes to help the lesser evil from the other party. This incentive to cross vote did not exist when there were two candidates from both parties, and it was often argued that running a single candidate was bad strategy, since the second votes of one’s own partisans might be the cause of defeat (Hanham 1978: 197). Whether running one candidate was bad strategy or not, contemporaries were correct that the incentive to cast split votes in two-against-one contests was greater than in two-against-two contests; the mean split voting rate in the 594 three-candidate contests from the post-1832 sample was 17.1%, while that in the 307 four-candidate races was 6.2%. Hence, if the yearly averages are not to reflect simply changes in the mix of

⁴It should be noted that in a two-against-one or two-against-two contest, candidates of the same party were by no means necessarily united. Indeed, a general prejudice against candidates “coalescing” and running joint campaigns lasted into the 1830s and beyond, and relations between candidates of the same party were not always amicable. See Davis (1972: 113–14, 117, 132–33, 208), Olney (1973: 129), and Nossiter (1975: 48).

Development of a party-oriented electorate

Table 9.4. Trends in split voting, 1818–1910

Year	All constituencies		Boroughs		Counties	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
1818	26.6	23,157				
1820	19.1	11,953				
1826	19.1	25,653				
1830	26.2	40,500				
1831	14.7	24,109				
1832	15.6	179,228	20.0	44,848	14.1	134,380
1835	18.8	126,024	20.9	81,608	14.8	44,416
1837	10.6	188,199	13.0	92,151	8.2	96,048
1841	7.3	153,173	8.1	98,886	5.8	54,307
1847	22.9	104,310	25.3	75,995	16.3	28,315
1852	16.3	93,697	16.6	64,497	15.7	29,200
1857	19.0	100,587	17.7	67,300	21.5	33,287
1859	11.6	83,183	13.6	60,996	6.2	22,187
1865	8.5	149,985	10.3	81,129	6.3	68,856
1868	5.5	282,532	6.0	109,836	5.2	172,696
1874	4.8	407,669	5.1	258,722	4.2	148,947
1880	4.5	704,890	4.7	397,073	4.3	307,817
1885	3.5	179,486	3.5	179,486	— ^a	—
1886	2.3	177,566	2.3	177,566	—	—
1892	2.7	205,780	2.7	205,780	—	—
1895	3.0	171,034	3.0	171,034	—	—
1900	4.4	184,864	4.4	184,864	—	—
1906	2.7	270,992	2.7	270,992	—	—
1910 (Jan.)	1.8	299,377	1.8	299,377	—	—
1910 (Dec.)	2.0	306,675	2.0	306,675	—	—

Note: The table is read as follows; In 1832, of the 179,228 voters in the sample, 15.6% split their votes; of the 44,848 voters in boroughs, 20.0% split their votes; and so on.

^aThere were no double-member county districts after 1885.

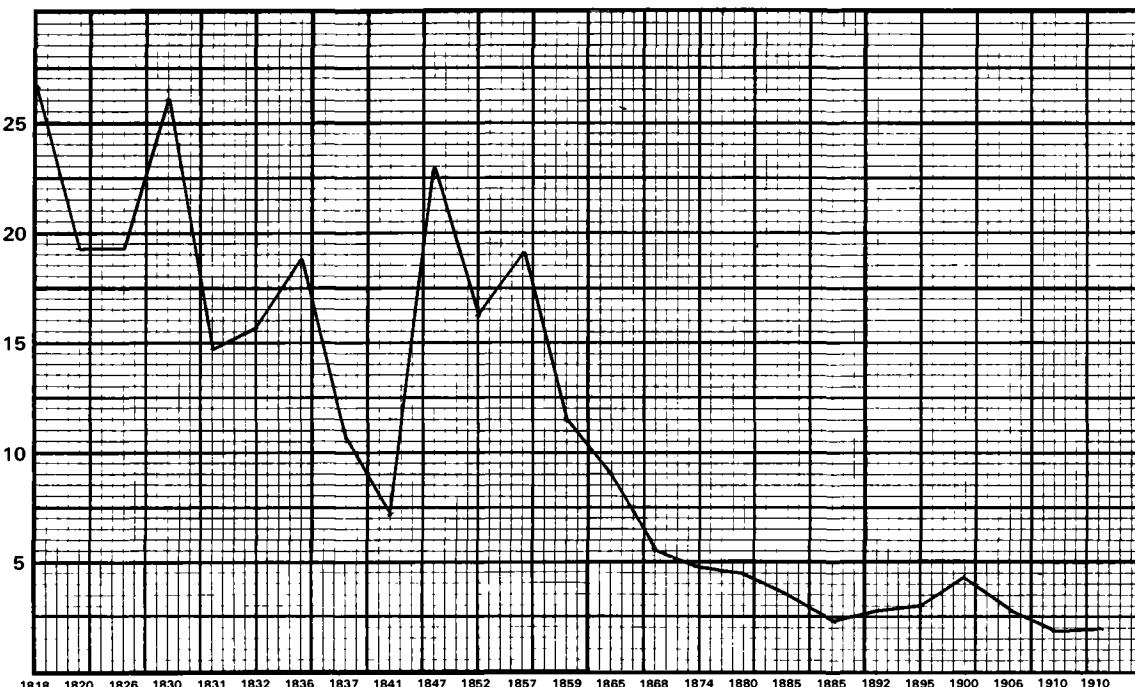
contest types (rather than changes in voting behavior), it is sensible to consider controlling for contest type.

EVIDENCE ON NON-PARTISAN VOTING IN THE
ELECTORATE, 1818–1910

The basic trends in voting behavior at English elections between 1818 and the fourth Reform Act can be seen in Table 9.4 and Figure 9.1 (for split voting) and in Table 9.5 (for non-partisan plumping). Averages are presented for all constituencies, and for boroughs and counties separately,

Percent of voters splitting their votes

Figure 9.1. Trends in split voting, 1818–1910.



Year of general election

Development of a party-oriented electorate

without controlling for contest type. The effect of contest type, as well as of decisions regarding the identification of partisan affiliations for candidates, will be discussed presently.

One way to summarize the findings on split voting in Table 9.4 is as a testimonial to the electoral significance of the Reform Acts. The elections held under the first (1832–65), second (1868–80), and third (1885–1910) Reform Acts appear to reveal three successively more party-oriented electorates: the highest figure for the 1832–65 period (22.9%) is four times the highest figure for the second period, and five times the maximum for the third period; the lowest figures for each period exceed the highest figures for the next; and no clear trends are perceptible throughout any period except the second. This contrast between reform periods is heightened if the split voting rates before 1832 are considered. SV rates were clearly even higher on average before 1832 than they were after 1832. The overall average SV rates for the four periods 1818–31, 1832–65, 1868–80, and 1885–1910 were respectively 21.9%, 13.9%, 4.8%, and 2.7%.

What might explain such a pattern? One hypothesis, at least as regards 1867 and 1884, might run as follows. The newly enfranchised voters, largely from a lower social class than the older electorate, were less well informed about politics in general and about the personal characteristics of the candidates in particular; hence, they made cruder decisions, often relying simply on party labels and the recommendations of the partisan press. Nossiter's finding that split votes in the northern counties "seem to have been more often cast by the professional and upper classes... than by the retailers or craftsmen" (Nossiter 1975: 179) lends some color to this hypothesis. Another hypothesis might focus on the redistricting process: perhaps only the most party-oriented double-member districts survived the reallocation of seats associated with the three Reform Acts.

Neither of these ideas, as it turns out, really furnishes an explanation. First, Mitchell has found, in an extensive poll-book-based study of the behavior of the newly enfranchised in 1868, no difference in the behavior of the pre- and post-1867 electorates.⁵ Even if it is granted that the social class hypothesis ought to hold more strongly in 1885, since it was then that the lower working class first entered the electorate in large numbers, the point is of limited significance as far as the overall decline of split voting is concerned, for most of the decrease comes before 1885. The poorer information of the working class may explain the modest decline from the second to the third reform period, but of course one cannot prove this using poll books, as these cease to be available after 1872. Anent the first Reform Act, one would have to posit a very large difference

⁵Personal communication from Jeremy Mitchell.

The electorate

in the behavior of pre- and post-reform voters in order to account for the observed 8 percentage point drop in split voting. What evidence there is shows no such difference (Phillips 1982).

As to redistricting, the average SV rate in 1865 for districts which were reduced to single-member status in 1867 does exceed the SV rate in districts which kept both their seats, but the NPP rate goes the other way. The total non-partisan voting rate (defined as the sum of the split voting and non-partisan plumping rates) is 19.9% for reduced constituencies, as opposed to 19.5% for unreduced constituencies. The redistricting hypothesis might hold more water in 1885. The non-partisan voting rate in 1880 for the 23 boroughs which remained double-member was 5.8%, as opposed to 9.4% for constituencies which became single-member. Hence, it might be best to discount comparisons made between pre- and post-1885 figures.

Another approach to explaining the evident contrast between reform periods, which focuses on the sheer size (and expansion) of the electorate, is put off to the next chapter. In the remainder of this section, we examine some finer patterns which lie within and cut across reform eras.

Looked at in more detail, the post-1832 figures in Table 9.4 and Figure 9.1 can be classified into four periods. First, there is a sharp decline in split voting from 1832–35 to 1841. Second, SV rates are extremely high for the 1847–57 period. Third, the rate declines sharply and monotonically, from 19% in 1857 to 5.5% in 1868. Fourth, split voting continues to decline from 1868 to 1886, fluctuating thereafter, but always remaining below the 1868 level.

It is interesting to note that the figures for boroughs and counties separately can be described in the same fashion. Although in most years the SV rate was lower in counties than in boroughs, the patterns of change follow almost parallel lines. The chief difference is that the SV rate for counties drops precipitously from 1857 to 1859, without much further decline thereafter, while the figures for boroughs show a more gradual declivity from 1857 to 1868. Since the county statistics are underpinned by less than ten contests in the period from 1841 to 1859, probably not too much should be made of this difference.

Analysis of split voting by regions reveals that, in any given year, the highest SV rates were generally to be found in the north. What is more important for our purposes, however, is that the patterns of change in split voting over time are quite similar for all regions. In each region there was a decline to 1841, a reinstatement of high rates in 1847–57, a sharp decline between 1857 and 1868, and a further but small and gradual decline thereafter.⁶ An investigation of split voting in boroughs

⁶Readers familiar with Nossiter's work will be surprised to hear this statement

Development of a party-oriented electorate

with fewer than 1,000 voters, between 1,000 and 2,000 voters, and more than 2,000 voters tells a similar story. Although smaller boroughs tended to have higher split voting rates (see Chapter 10), all three classes of boroughs showed roughly the same pattern of change over time.

It appears, then, that the trends in split voting visible in Table 9.4 and Figure 9.1 are to a considerable extent *national* trends. Pooling the data within each year does obscure cross-sectional variation, but the longitudinal pattern is basically the same in counties, in large and small boroughs, and in the various regions of the country.

Roughly speaking, the same four-period description of trends can be applied to the NPP figures presented in Table 9.5. Generally, when SV rates were high, so were NPP rates, and this is true for boroughs and counties separately as well. Two differences seem worth noting. First, the decline in the NPP rate from 1857 to 1859 is sharper than the corresponding decline in the SV rate. Second, after 1895, NPP rates increased considerably; indeed, one has to go back to 1857 to find a figure higher than the 7.8% registered for 1906. The reason for this recurrence of high NPP rates in the 1900s is the appearance of the Labour party and the decision made to consider Lib/Lab and Labour candidates as part of the Liberal party.

In general, the policy on party affiliations adopted for Tables 9.4 and 9.5 was to construe the Conservative and Liberal parties as broadly as possible. Thus, Tories, Protectionists, and Liberal Unionists were classified as Conservatives; Radicals, Reformers, Whigs, Gladstonian Liberals, Lib/Labs, and Labourites were classified as Liberals. Peelites, or Liberal Conservatives, were dealt with as A. L. Lowell did for the later years of his study of party discipline in Parliament (Lowell 1902); that is, most were labeled as Conservatives, some as Liberals, on the basis of their voting behavior and later affiliation.⁷

applied to the north. The discrepancy between our findings and those of Nossiter is not because we have more data (although we do) or use weighted rather than simple means. In previous work (Cox 1983), we used only the data used by Nossiter and still arrived at a different conclusion. Nossiter apparently accepted the party affiliations given by Bean (1890) for the most part, although it is evident that he used other sources as well. In any event, a few of the higher split voting rates reported by Nossiter appear to stem from errors in Bean's attributions of party. The only really large discrepancy between Nossiter's figures and our yearly average figures comes in 1859, for which Nossiter reported a mean split voting rate of 26.7, and the difference here stems from three constituencies – Lancaster, Preston, and Bradford – in which Bean reported the party of some candidate(s) as Liberal whereas Craig (1977) reported the same candidate(s) as Conservative (or vice versa).

⁷The final authority used here on party affiliations before 1885 is *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1832–1885* (Craig 1977). Indeed, since Craig's policy is identical with that described in the text, all party affiliations before 1885 agree with his. The problem of identifying which Liberal Conservatives were really Liberal and which were Conservative was, according to Lowell, "rendered less difficult by the

The electorate

Table 9.5 *Trends in non-partisan plumping, 1818–1910*

Year	All constituencies (%)	Boroughs (%)	Counties (%)
1818	12.1		
1820	13.8		
1826	10.7		
1830	16.2		
1831	6.7		
1832	6.4	8.1	5.8
1835	8.8	10.1	6.2
1837	5.0	4.2	6.1
1841	3.1	3.2	2.7
1847	15.4	17.4	10.1
1852	9.0	10.4	5.7
1857	13.7	10.0	21.4
1859	5.3	6.3	2.4
1865	4.8	6.5	2.7
1868	4.2	4.7	3.8
1874	4.1	5.0	2.2
1880	2.3	2.8	1.8
1885	3.2	3.2	— ^a
1886	2.3	2.3	—
1892	2.3	2.3	—
1895	2.8	2.8	—
1900	3.4	3.4	—
1906	7.8	7.8	—
1910 (Jan.)	3.4	3.4	—
1910 (Dec.)	3.8	3.8	—

Note: N values are the same as those in Table 9.4.

^aThere were no double-member county districts after 1885.

The consequences of this policy on party affiliations are illustrated most clearly in the post-1900 NPP figures. Although the Labour party ran relatively few candidates before the Great War, the urban constituencies which remained double-member after 1885 were particularly likely venues for Labour or Lib/Lab activity, in part because they tended to have a larger working class population, and in part because the Liberal and Labour candidates could split the representation (whereas in single member constituencies, one or the other candidate would have to step down if open conflict was to be avoided). Hence, there are proportion-curious psychological fact that most of them, though disliking to call themselves by a party name, were unusually constant in going into the lobby with the party whip" (Lowell 1902: 326). After 1885, party affiliations are as given in Appendix 1 of Craig (1974), except that Liberal Unionists have been classed with the Conservatives, and Lib/Labs and Labour candidates with the Liberals.

Development of a party-oriented electorate

Table 9.6. *Split voting and non-partisan plumping, 1832–1910*

Year	Split voting		Non-partisan plumping	
	(1) Mean	(2) Difference	(3) Mean	(4) Difference
1832	17.5	1.9	9.7	3.3
1835	19.5	.7	9.5	.7
1837	10.9	.3	5.3	.3
1841	7.8	.5	3.5	.4
1847	20.8	-2.1	11.9	-3.5
1852	16.5	.2	7.8	-1.2
1857	20.3	1.3	13.5	-2
1859	11.5	-.1	5.2	-.1
1865	8.5	0	4.8	0
1868	5.2	-.3	4.6	.4
1874	4.7	-.1	3.4	-.7
1880	4.4	-.1	2.3	0
1885	3.5	0	3.2	0
1886	2.3	0	2.3	0
1892	2.7	0	2.3	0
1895	3.0	0	1.8	0
1900	4.4	0	2.9	-.5
1906	2.9	.2	2.0	-5.8
1910 (Jan.)	1.3	-.5	1.8	-1.6
1910 (Dec.)	1.4	-.6	1.5	-2.3

Note: The figures given here are based on the party affiliations given in Vincent and Stenton (1971) for years before 1885. From 1885 on, affiliations are as given in Craig (1974), except that Liberal Unionists are classified as Conservatives. These affiliations differ from those used in Tables 9.4 and 9.5. Columns (2) and (4) give the differences between the figures in columns (1) and (3) and the corresponding figures in Tables 9.4 and 9.5.

ately more contests involving Labour or Lib/Lab candidatures in the sample than in the post-1900 polity as a whole.⁸ And these contests, pitting two Conservatives against a Liberal and a Labourite, for example, tended to have high NPP rates, due chiefly to the large numbers of plumpers polled for the Liberal and Labour candidates. Naturally, this species of “non partisan” plumper does not seem nearly as non-partisan as plumpers cast for two Liberals, and the question is raised as to what

⁸Of 162 Labour candidates in the first decade of the twentieth century, 38 (or 23.5%) ran in double-member districts. This is more than twice as many as would be expected on the basis of the number of seats available in such districts. Looking just to the 94 Labour victories between 1900 and 1910, 27 came in double-member districts. Thus, although two-member districts constituted only 5.1% of all districts, they produced 28.7% of all Labour MPs.

The electorate

Table 9.7. *Split voting by contest type, 1832–1910*

Year	2L/ 1C	N	2C/1L	N	2/1	N	2/2	N
1832	15.2	152,001	19.1	19,969	15.7	171,970	13.1	7,258
1835	21.0	73,807	17.4	36,173	19.8	109,980	11.7	16,044
1837	11.8	80,733	12.4	59,306	12.1	140,039	6.2	48,160
1841	7.8	35,412	12.3	51,793	10.5	87,205	3.1	65,968
1847	27.9	48,703	18.6	28,617	24.5	77,320	18.4	26,990
1852	18.3	41,555	18.6	34,352	18.5	75,907	7.2	17,790
1857	22.3	59,086	14.3	27,507	19.7	86,593	14.5	13,994
1859	13.9	46,789	13.4	14,617	13.8	61,406	5.7	21,777
1865	10.9	66,336	9.7	35,810	10.5	102,146	4.2	47,839
1868	8.4	100,424	6.7	48,748	7.9	149,172	2.8	133,360
1874	5.3	151,718	6.9	74,740	5.8	226,458	3.5	181,211
1880	5.5	195,063	6.1	148,433	5.7	343,496	3.4	361,394
1885					3.9	64,797	3.4	114,689
1886					2.4	56,709	2.3	120,857
1892					2.9	73,003	2.7	132,777
1895					4.3	69,844	2.1	101,190
1900					10.2	41,190	2.7	143,674
1906					4.6	73,928	4.0	197,064
1910 (Jan.)					2.1	14,381	1.8	284,996
1910 (Dec.)					2.6	76,126	1.8	230,549

Note: The figures in column 1 refer to contests pitting two Liberals against one Conservative; those in column 3, to contests with two Conservatives and one Liberal; those in column 5, to all two-against-one contests; and those in column 7, to all two-against-two contests. Party affiliations are the same as those used in Tables 9.4 and 9.5.

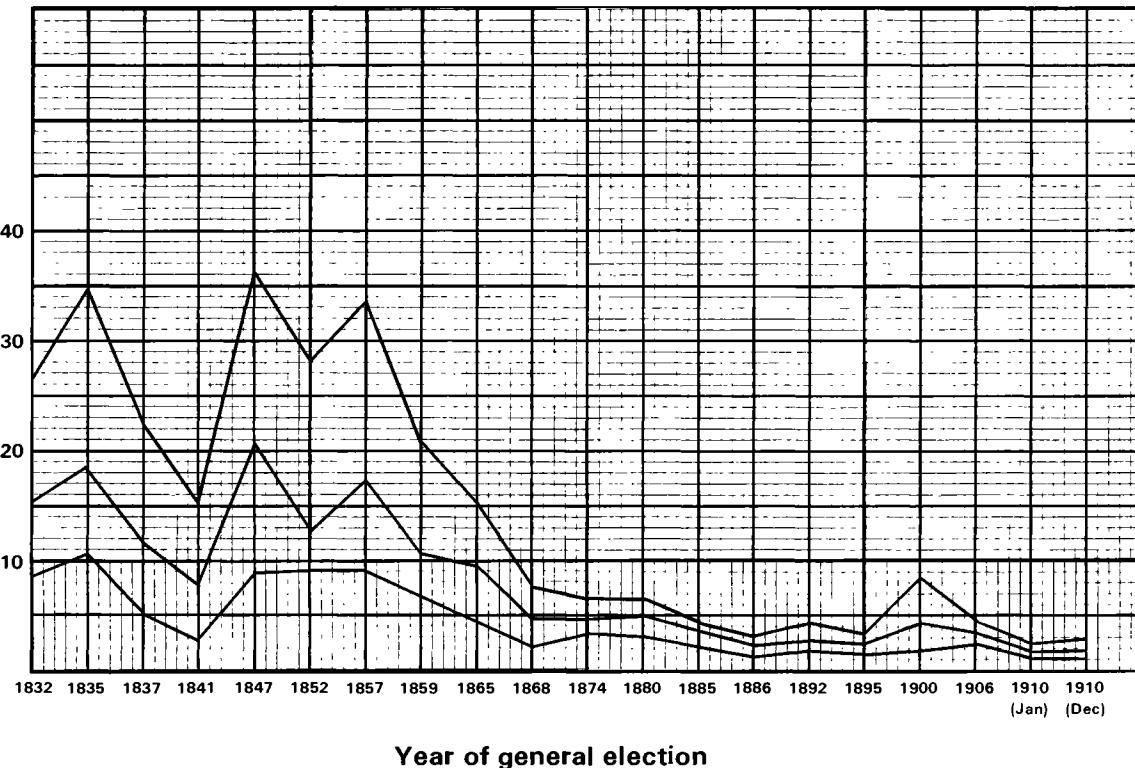
effect a different policy on party affiliations would have on the figures – both for non-partisan plumping and split voting.

In the case of the Labour party, the question does not seem too important. If Labour is preserved as a separate party, the number of two-against-one and two-against-two contests after 1900 falls, and so does the NPP rate, the SV rate being largely unaffected (see Table 9.6). So no important conclusion is affected – indeed, the trend toward firmer party attachments is made clearer. In the case of the Peelites, however, one might expect a more important modification of results – in two ways. First, the high rates of non-partisan plumping in 1847, 1852, and 1857 may be due to classifying Peelites with the two main parties. Second, since the Peelites occupied the “middle ground” between the Liberals and Conservatives, classifying them with the main parties might also have inflated the SV rates.

The best way to address these questions is simply to classify all Liberal

Split voting rate

Figure 9.2. Trends in split voting, as measured by the median and first and third quartiles.



The electorate

Conservatives as members of a separate party, and recompute the figures. If one does this, nothing much changes, as can be seen in Table 9.6. The figures in Table 9.6 were computed according to a policy on party affiliations which is more or less opposite to that underlying Tables 9.4 and 9.5. The Conservative and Liberal parties were construed narrowly, not broadly; and Tories, Whigs, Radicals, Protectionists, and Liberal Conservatives were preserved as separate parties.⁹ Although it does appear that the SV and NPP rates in 1847, and the NPP rate in 1852, could have been inflated by the previous decision regarding Liberal Conservatives, the effect is not large. Most of the yearly figures are essentially unaffected by the change in policy on party affiliations, and the basic patterns discovered in Tables 9.4 and 9.5 are preserved in Table 9.6.

If the policy on party affiliation has no effect on the basic patterns in the data, neither does the mix of contest types. Table 9.7 presents yearly split voting figures for four subsets of contests: those involving two Liberals and a Conservative, those involving two Conservatives and a Liberal, all two-against-one contests (the union of the first two subsets), and all two-against-two contests. Within all categories of contests, the basic trends visible in the combined data are preserved. Thus, these trends cannot be attributed to changes in the mix of contests from one year to the next.

Nor, finally, are the trends due to a few exceptional contests in the early years inflating the averages. If one calculates the SV rate for each contest in a given general election, one can compute the first quartile, median, and third quartile of the resulting set of figures; if these statistics are plotted for each general election from 1818 to 1910, the result is Figure 9.2. As can be seen, the entire distribution of contests shifts in accord with the weighted means reported earlier.¹⁰

⁹Party affiliations in the pre-1885 period were taken from Vincent and Stenton (1971) and Henry Stooks Smith (1973). After 1885, party affiliations are as given in Craig (1974), except that Liberal Unionists have been classed with the Conservatives.

¹⁰It might also be noted that if all contest types – not just two-against-one and two-against-two contests – are included in the analysis, the basic pattern remains the same.

The causes of a party-oriented electorate

The evidence in Chapter 9 reveals clearly that split voting and non-partisan plumping declined markedly in the hundred years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Whereas 38.7% of all sampled voters cast non-partisan votes in the general election of 1818, only 5.8% did so in December 1910. The decline, however, was neither linear nor monotonic. Each Reform Act seems to have introduced a new era in terms of the levels of non-partisan voting registered at general elections, and the downward trend could be interrupted, as shown by the resurgence of non-partisan voting in the decade following 1847.

These findings raise three questions. First, why was there any long-term decline in non-partisan voting at all? Second, why are the figures periodized by the Reform Acts? Third, what explains the “short-term” or year-to-year fluctuations within reform periods? To answer these questions, which concern the trends over time in national non-partisan voting rates, it will help to examine constituency rates cross-sectionally as well. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses should be grounded in a proper understanding of the causes of split voting and non-partisan plumping at the individual level. To establish such an understanding is the first objective of this chapter.

EXPLAINING NON-PARTISAN VOTING

Both split voting and non-partisan plumping indicated the use by electors of some criteria other than partisan affiliation. In order to explain non-partisan voting, then, it is necessary to identify what those other criteria were. This process of identification will be facilitated if we first recognize the fundamental fact of early Victorian elections: open voting. As noted above, electors before 1872 declared their votes *viva voce*, and their decisions were publicly recorded in poll books. As a consequence, the individual voter was subject to a variety of sometimes intense local pres-

The electorate

sures, which historians have generally discussed under the headings of bribery and "influence."

Influence, like water, generally flowed downhill. The vice chancellor of Cambridge University, for example, on occasion sent the marshal of the University to the licensed lodging-house keepers in order to recommend a candidate, and pointedly deferred the day for renewing licenses until after a parliamentary by-election in 1834. In the counties, the influence of landlord over tenant was taken for granted, and the typical county poll book was considered "almost a topography of the estates" (Gash 1977: 174, 178). In some boroughs, rich men could make or purchase influence: Robert Richardson-Gardner, going to Windsor in 1866 to "create an interest," spent lavishly on clubs, charity, and entertainment; purchased property and erected dwellings which would qualify their tenants for the franchise; accepted only Conservative tenants; evicted those who voted against him in 1868; and was returned in 1874, by which time he had 220 voting tenants representing more than 10% of the legal electorate (Hanham 1978: 67). Norman Gash has offered the generalization that "wherever in ordinary social and economic relationships there existed authority on the one side and dependence on the other, political influence was always liable to be exercised" (Gash 1977: 174–75).

Not all electoral influence flowed downhill, however. The unenfranchised, for example, could affect elections not only through physical intimidation but also by the practice of "exclusive dealing": giving their custom only to shopkeepers who had voted as they wished. Nor were electoral pressures always or even often so coercive as those indicated thus far. Historians generally have a far more organic view of influence, stressing that the bloc voting evident in poll books arose from a more complex tie than that of coercion and subservience (Kitson-Clark 1951; Moore 1966; Clarke 1972; Nossiter 1975; Hanham 1978).

Whether coercive or "legitimate," whether flowing uphill or downhill, electoral influence was the natural concomitant of open and publicly documented voting, and historians have accorded it first priority in their researches; most would agree with Hanham's assessment that "the electoral history of the period between 1832 and 1885 is largely the history of electoral influence" (Hanham 1968: 13). The question at issue here is what impact electoral influence had on the rate at which Victorian electors split their votes or cast non-partisan plumpers.

An interesting suggestion in regard to split voting is made in an 1866 article from the *Fortnightly Review*:

At present we see the larger proportion of the electors in the boroughs and county constituencies, where two members are to be chosen, give one vote to a Liberal

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

and another to a Conservative. Thus they secure the grand object of giving offence to neither party. (Wilson 1866: 435)

The author was referring to competing or cross-pressuring electoral influences. A shopkeeper, for example, faced with a Tory landlord and an important Whig customer, may have split his vote in order to offend neither. Electoral influence is believed by some to have been declining in the 1860s and 1870s (Moore 1976), and if it was generally cross-pressuring, then this provides a possible explanation of the decline in split voting.

There is, however, no firm basis for considering cross-pressuring influence to be significant. Most historians do not mention it at all. Nossiter (1975: 179) considers it unimportant as a cause of split voting, at least in the boroughs; O'Gorman (1982: 75–76) refers to influence in general as a cause of *party* voting rather than *split* voting.

If influence was complete rather than cross-pressuring – that is, if it controlled both votes – then its importance for a study of split voting is chiefly that it magnifies the decisions of influential men in the statistics. One can consider a hypothetical county constituency in which the electorate is dominated by a relatively few landed magnates together with their numerous tenants, and suppose that tenants always vote exactly as their landlords wish. This would be a rather extreme construal of Lord Stanley's comment in 1841 that "when any man attempted to estimate the probable result of a county election in England, it was ascertained by calculating the number of the great landed proprietors in the county and weighing the number of occupiers under them" (Kitson-Clark 1951: 112). The split voting rates in such a county would for the most part reflect the decisions of the landlords, each being weighted by the number of his tenants. One can hold the amount of influence constant, and produce virtually any rates of split voting by stipulating the decisions of the landed magnates. Or, conversely, one can vary the amount of influence, without any necessary implication for split voting.

It would seem, then, that there is no necessary relationship between influence and split voting, if influence was complete. Even if influence was often cross-pressuring, it is hard to see how variations in the amount or nature of influence could explain the short-term trends in split voting. Did influence decline or become more complete until 1841, then increase or become more cross-pressuring in 1847–57, and so forth? It seems unlikely.¹

¹Another kind of cross-pressure may have occurred when the voter faced an influence contrary to his own opinions. If the influence was only powerful enough to secure one vote (Nossiter 1975: 48, 53), a split vote may have resulted. Here again there is

The electorate

If electoral influence was largely unrelated to the rate at which Victorians split their votes, what of bribery? There is no doubt that votes were purchased at Victorian elections, and corruption in general ranks a close second in the historical literature as a determinant of election outcomes. The significance of the purchase of votes for split voting, however, depends on a distinction analogous to that made between cross-pressuring and complete influence. If bribers generally purchased both votes, then the rates of bribery and of split voting should have been largely uncorrelated; but if only one vote was purchased, then increased bribery may have increased split voting.

As in the case of influence, very little attention has been given to whether bribery was complete (two votes) or incomplete (one vote only). John Phillips has argued the latter position as regards the boroughs of Northampton, Lewes, and Maidstone in the 1820s and 1830s (Phillips 1982). He suggests that at two-against-one contests in these boroughs the adherents of the singleton candidate sold their second votes, and he thus interprets the observed decline in split voting in these boroughs during and after the reform crisis as evidence of a decline in bribery.

Despite Phillips's work, we discount bribery as a general explanation for split voting, on several grounds. First, Phillips's argument is of course restricted both geographically and temporally. Second, there is no evidence that bribery was especially prevalent in years when split voting was high, or rare in years when it fell off; indeed, the correlation between yearly split voting rates and a crude measure of national trends in corruption (the number of elections declared void or undue on petition) is insignificant and *negative* ($- .21$). Third, evidence presented in Chapter 12 shows that the policies which MPs supported in Parliament influenced the number of split votes they received. For example, the more Conservative measures which a Liberal MP supported in the Commons, the more split votes he was likely to receive at election time, *ceteris paribus*. Such findings suggest a policy-based explanation of split voting and put a limit on the possible importance of bribery.

Before investigating the possibility of policy-based split voting, let us recapitulate the argument thus far. Open voting exposed electors to a variety of pressures, both directly pecuniary (bribery) and otherwise (influence). One can divide the Victorian electorate conceptually into three classes, based on their susceptibility to such pressures. First, those whose votes were neither bought nor determined by influence can be termed the *independent electorate*. Some of these electors may have purchased votes or exerted influence on their own. Indeed, the independent elec-

no real evidence that this kind of cross-pressuring influence can explain the short-term trends in split voting.

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

torate should be construed broadly enough to include peers, who, while legally debarred from voting in parliamentary elections, nonetheless sometimes had the *de facto* disposal of the votes of their dependents. Second, those electors both of whose votes were controlled or bought by some other person can be termed the *dependent electorate*. Finally, those electors who were cross-pressured or only one of whose votes was sold or influenced can be termed the *cross-pressured electorate*.

Thus far, our discussion has focused on split voting in the cross-pressed electorate. It is clear that explaining non-partisan voting in the independent electorate is also an important task. Since by definition independent electors were not subject to controlling pressures from others, any explanation for their behavior must lie in their own values and motivations. It is assumed here simply that independent electors sought to use their votes in order to elect the candidates they most preferred.²

²The discussion of split voting in the text is derived from an expected utility analysis presented more fully in Cox (1984). An abbreviated version of this analysis is presented here for readers interested in a more formal derivation of the results used. Consider an election between two Conservatives, C₁ and C₂, and one Liberal, L. For any given voter *i*, let $u_i(C_i)$ be the value or utility to *i* of having the first Conservative elected; interpret $u_i(C_1)$ and $u_i(L)$ similarly. Assume that the utility of having any two candidates elected is simply the sum of the individual utilities; thus, the value of C₁ and C₂ winning is $u(C_1) + u(C_2)$, and so forth (subscript *i*'s will be suppressed). The kind of decision facing a voter in double-member districts can be illustrated by considering a voter for whom $u(C_1) > u(C_2) > u(L)$. The most preferred outcome for this voter is a Conservative sweep (C₁, C₂), the next most preferred outcome a (C₁, L) return, and the least preferred a (C₂, L) victory. Clearly, the voter should vote for C₁, since the only effect such a vote can have on the outcome is to defeat either L or C₂ (those two candidates receiving the most votes win, and a vote for C₁ may raise him above either L or C₂). Similarly, the voter should never vote for his least preferred candidate, L. This leaves two options: voting for the two most preferred candidates, C₁ and C₂, or voting for C₁ alone. Why would a voter vote only for C₁? Because the vote for C₂ is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it might defeat L, a desired result. On the other hand, it might defeat C₁, thus replacing a more preferred by a less preferred candidate. Depending on how large the utility differentials between C₁, C₂, and L are, and on the probabilities that the vote for C₂ will defeat L or C₁, it makes sense for a voter with these preferences to plump. For example, if the voter intensely prefers the arch-Tory views of C₁ to the middle-of-the-road Conservatism of C₂, and does not see much difference between C₂ and L, he is more likely to plump; and if the voter thinks it certain that L will be elected, then the only possible effect of the vote for C₂ is to defeat C₁, and again he is more likely to plump. Similar points can be made about split voting. Consider another voter for whom $u(L) > u(C_1) > u(C_2)$. This voter is more likely to cast a split vote for L and C₁ (a) the larger the utility differential between C₁ and C₂ relative to that between C₁ and L, and (b) the larger the probability that a vote for C₁ will defeat C₂ relative to the probability that such a vote will defeat L. For the purposes of this discussion, the important point is that both non-partisan plumping and split voting are more likely when voters perceive significant differences in the value (to themselves) of the election of candidates of the same party. Hence, from a theoretical perspective, any trend which reduces the differences which voters perceive between candidates of the same party will tend also to depress split voting and non-partisan plumping.

The electorate

Which candidates were preferred naturally depended on the criteria that each elector used in evaluating his alternatives. These criteria presumably included the personal and local characteristics, partisan affiliations, and policy stands of the candidates. One might picture the voter abstractly as evaluating or “scoring” each candidate on these criteria, weighting each score in accordance with its perceived importance, and then simply adding the weighted scores to arrive at an overall evaluation. This model doubtless overstates the degree to which real voters explicitly considered and measured the various qualities of candidates, but the abstraction is useful in explaining the basic cause of non-partisan voting. When an elector cast a non-partisan vote, he was distinguishing between two members of the same party: voting for one but not the other. That such a distinction was possible implies, first, that the candidates were perceived to differ on some relevant criterion and, second, that this criterion was weighted non-negligibly in the voter’s overall calculus. Turning these statements around, two propositions can be made about the probability that an independent voter would cast a non-partisan vote. First, the fewer the perceived differences between candidates of the same party, the lower should the chance have been of voting for one but not the other (i.e., of casting a split vote or non-partisan plumper). This suggests the importance both of the *actual* differences between candidates and of the level of information of the voter. Second, the more heavily the voter weighted the partisan affiliations of the various candidates in his overall evaluation (the more party-oriented he was), the lower should the probability have been that he would cast a non-partisan vote. In terms of our simple model, a voter would be totally party-oriented if the only criterion with any weight was partisan affiliation; two candidates of the same party would be identical as far as the voter was concerned, and hence no voting distinction would be made between them. In general, the greater the relative weight given to party, the less likely it was that the voter would perceive a sufficient overall difference between candidates of the same party to vote for one but not the other.

Now that we have an idea of why independent voters might have cast splits and plumpers, we can clarify the local and national factors that affected non-partisan voting rates, either cross-sectionally or longitudinally. Consider first the relationship between parliamentary dissent and split voting noted at the outset of Chapter 9. Although the figures on dissent are not as complete as one might wish, the year-to-year covariation between aggregate party cohesion and party voting in the electorate is nonetheless striking. The question is whether this covariation is due to the impact of discipline on party voting, the impact of party voting on discipline, or some other factors pushing both these developments. Although there is some evidence of a mutual causal relationship between

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

split voting and parliamentary dissidence – evidence which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 12 – we do not think that an explanation of the longitudinal trends lies primarily in these linkages. Rather, we suggest that other factors affected both legislators and electors, who then mutually reinforced each other's impetus toward party voting.

Consider, for example, the state of extra-parliamentary party organization. If one looks at a few admittedly crude indices of the health and vigor of the Conservative party as an electoral machine, one finds a pattern that is by now familiar. Before 1832, while there were Tory clubs in many constituencies, very few had actual Conservative associations. During Peel's first ministry (1834–35), a spate of new associations were started, and “well before the general election of 1841 the party possessed a widespread if loose connexion of local organizations throughout England” (Gash 1983: 143–45). However, many of these organizations disappeared, became ineffective, or were converted into Protectionist societies in the 1840s. R. W. Davis (1976: 142) writes of Buckinghamshire that “the 1840s saw the end of any enduring political organizations in either the boroughs or the county for at least twenty years.” Gash (1983: 144) notes more generally that “the Conservative disruption of 1846, the competition of Protectionist societies, and the somnolence that overcame British party politics between 1856 and 1865 were all powerful dissolvents of conventional local party organizations.” In the later 1850s and 1860s, however, a resurgence of Conservative organization began, and by 1864 the Conservative principal agent could boast that “there never was a time in the history of the Conservative party when it was so thoroughly organized as at present. The effect of the continuous communication kept up during the last few years with our local representatives . . . is now being realized” (Stewart 1978: 332). After 1867, and again after 1884, the stimulus of an expanded electorate spurred the further growth of local associations. The broad outlines of local party organization and party voting – both in Parliament and in the electorate – are thus quite similar.

A similar story can be told on the Conservative side at the *central* organizational level. In 1835, F. R. Bonham became the first full-time electoral agent of the Conservative party, and the widespread development of local associations was due in part to his exertions. Bonham also had a hand in finding candidates for constituencies and constituencies for candidates. His exertions were sometimes directly relevant to the question of non-partisan voting:

In 1832 he asked Peel to suggest to Lord Villiers, the Conservative candidate at Honiton, that he might do more to assist the return of the second Conservative candidate at the election. Villiers's return was certain, and Bonham had learned that he looked solely to his own position. Conservative electors might therefore

The electorate

plump for him or cast their second vote for the Whig candidate. A gentle nudge might rouse Villiers to the danger. (Stewart 1978: 138–39)

When the Conservative party split over repeal of the Corn Laws, Bonham and most of the agents he had recruited remained loyal to Peel. Consequently, the electoral organization of the Conservative party was set back. From 1846 to 1852 the Conservatives had no equivalent to Bonham. There was, at least from 1851, an election committee at the Carlton Club, but it appears sometimes to have lacked sufficient information from the localities. Fifteen of its agents, paid by the central party, were discovered to be “notoriously strong Liberals,” and its attempts to match candidates and constituencies sometimes backfired miserably (Stewart 1978: 268–69). In 1852, Disraeli secured the services of his solicitor, Philip Rose, as principal agent. Rose, and his assistant Markham Spofforth, rebuilt the necessary informational network in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1866 a national registration association was founded, and 1870 saw the formal establishment of the Conservative Central Office. John Gorst was appointed as principal agent, and the Conservative victory in 1874 has often been partially credited to his vigor and organizational skill. In 1885, the long and legendary reign of R. W. Middleton began.

It is not hard to think of plausible connections between partisan organizational activity and the behavior of the electorate that might explain the rough correlation that seems so clearly to exist between them.³ Bonham’s activities in encouraging candidates to help their colleagues, the distribution of partisan propaganda, and the direct effects of organized canvassing come readily to mind.

Also of obvious importance was the partisanship of the political press. The importance of newspapers in the dissemination of political information was recognized by all politicians, and both parties subsidized sympathetic editors. Vincent has emphasized the importance of the penny press – which arose after the removal of the Stamp Tax on newspapers in 1855 – in contributing to the “formation of national parties as communities of sentiment” (Vincent 1966: xx). Often less independent than the older papers, and more interested in politics as a method of increasing circulation, the new press tended to be consistently partisan. Verbatim reports of parliamentary debates allowed readers to follow the battle in Parliament each day, the editorials providing partisan cues. The sugges-

³Statistical evidence of the effect of party activity on party voting is hard to come by. One resource which might be used is the census of Conservative associations in 1874 utilized in Chapter 5. Using this document, the SV and NPP rates in the 42 constituencies which had both Conservative associations and vote counts in 1874 can be compared to the corresponding rates in the 11 constituencies which had vote counts but no associations. On the one hand, split voting was lower in organized (5.2%) than in unorganized (6.7%) constituencies. On the other hand, non-partisan plumping was higher (5.1% versus 2.8%). Neither of the differences is statistically significant.

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

tion is that voters in the 1860s may have cast fewer non-partisan votes in part because they were exposed for the first time to a cheap and mass circulation partisan press. Of course, the emergence of the penny press cannot explain the ups and downs in party voting before 1855. Nonetheless, partisanship even in the older press seems to have gone hand in hand with party voting in the electorate. Close notes the conversion of several major newspapers from an independent to a partisan editorial policy between 1834 and 1837, and opines that “A symptom, and possibly a cause, of increasing party feeling in the electorate was the firm alignment of the great majority of newspapers... with one or other of the two main parties” (Close 1969: 268–69; see also Stewart 1978: 129).

Another factor of obvious importance, but one that is difficult to examine systematically, was the practice of cutting deals with the opposition (Nossiter 1975: 179; Hanham 1978: 74). Many of the contests with exceptionally high split voting rates turn out to be those in which electoral alliances were forged between Conservatives and moderate Liberals, to the detriment of the radical wing of the Liberal party. Clearly, when the local party leadership was itself actively promoting split voting, high split voting rates were to be expected.

Somewhat less obviously, registration, and variations in the vigor with which the parties pursued their battle in the revision courts, may have affected non-partisan voting rates (especially in the boroughs) by altering the composition of the electorate. The parties often paid the registration fees of those poorer citizens whose claims to be registered they promoted. To the extent that there was a marginal class of citizens who would not take the trouble to register (perhaps for fear of expense or challenge), and to the extent that the parties chose to aid those who would cast straight party votes, increased attention to the register should have decreased non-partisan voting rates.

It is less easy to see any direct connection between the extra-parliamentary organization and dissent. One might adopt a generalized version of Ostrogorski’s ideas – which would have local associations pressuring their MPs to be party loyalists – but this does not seem attractive in light of the analysis in Chapter 5. One might hypothesize that when the extra-parliamentary organization was active and effective, so was the intra-parliamentary organization. Indeed, were there a detailed study of the size and efficiency of the Conservative whip organization in the Commons, it would probably show a pattern of development parallel to that of the electoral organization. But this suggests that both internal and external organization and internal and external rates of party voting were driven by other factors. The questions which this chapter set out to answer can usefully be asked more broadly.

The electorate

THE PARTY SYSTEM

Political scientists traditionally recognize various segments of political parties as meriting separate analysis. Thus, the party as a group of adherents in the voting population ("party-in-the-electorate") is considered separately from the party as a group of office-holders ("party-in-government") and the party as an electoral machine ("party organization").⁴ Sometimes it can seem that these various segments of the party have relatively little to do with one another. But if the status of the party-in-the-electorate can be tapped by the figures on non-partisan voting, the party-in-government by the figures on intra-party unity, and the party organization by the number of local associations and the efficacy of the central organization, then it is clear that in nineteenth century England the various segments of the political parties were intimately linked. Before 1832, when party organization at all levels was impermanent, the mean non-partisan voting rate was very high (33%), and party discipline in Parliament was relatively low and variable. After the first Reform Act, permanent organizations at the national and local levels were established for the first time, the non-partisan voting rate fell to 22.7%, and parliamentary discipline probably improved on average. In the second reform period (1867–85), party organization developed further and maintained a more continuous and consistent life, non-partisan voting fell to 8.2%, and dissent in Parliament fell to historically low levels. Finally, after 1885, party organization was recognizably modern, non-partisan voting had fallen below 5%, and intra-party unity in the Commons was generally quite high.

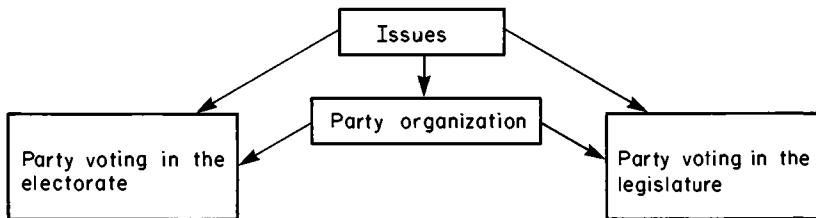
If the term "party system" is used to refer to the status of the parties at all three levels of analysis, then one can see that the entire party system developed as a more or less coherent whole. The questions posed at the beginning of the chapter become a bit more general. Why was there any long-term development of the party system at all? Why was there the periodization by Reform Acts? And why were there fluctuations within reform periods (and in particular, the rather large fluctuations within the first reform period)? We shall answer these questions in reverse order.

The year-to-year fluctuations of the party system are perhaps the most difficult aspect of party development to explain. There are many factors that potentially affected at least one feature of the party system and might have varied from one year to the next: factors such as the level of contributions to the central party coffers, the amount of cross-pressuring influence and bribery, the extent to which candidates of the same party chose to campaign together, the partisanship of the press, and the nature

⁴The use of these terms was popularized by Key (1964).

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

Figure 10.1. The effect of issues on the party system.



of political issues. However, only the last of these seems to have the properties required to explain the short-term trends in the party system. First, issues potentially affected all three segments of the party system directly: they provided the motivation to construct or refurbish political organizations; and if they cut along party lines, they reinforced party voting, while if they cut athwart party lines, they promoted cross voting – both in the legislature and in the electorate. Second, issues were national in effect. Thus, they can possibly explain why the pattern of development in non-partisan voting was roughly the same in every major region of the country and category of constituency. Third, issues were more likely to cause the developments we are interested in than to be caused by them. It seems clear, for example, that the Conservative party was built up in the 1830s in reaction to the issues of reform pushed onto the agenda by the Liberals; organization, discipline, and party voting all evolved together, fueled by the desire to prevent or pass certain legislation.

We argue, then, that the short-term fluctuations of the party system were due chiefly to the impact of vital issues that cut along or across party lines. The abstract view is illustrated in Figure 10.1. Issues are seen largely as predetermined short-term forces that affect the decisions of voters and MPs both directly and via the stimulus given to party organization. The plausibility of this view can be suggested by a brief review of some of the major issues that divided or failed to divide the parties, according to the standard historiography.

We can begin with the election of 1831, which was extraordinary in the degree to which it revolved around a single issue: the reform of parliamentary representation. This issue divided the *pays politique* into reformers ("the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill") and anti-reformers, a cleavage which cut to a considerable extent – but not entirely – along pre-existing party lines. The Reform Bill, which portended a fundamental reallocation of political representation and power, dominated the decisions of the independent electorate – probably to a degree unique in English history – and stimulated organizational effort. The Charles Street Committee, formed in 1831, constituted the first movement

The electorate

toward a permanent national organization for the Conservatives, and the war chest gathered by them seems to have been well filled by contemporary standards (Stewart 1978: 78). Liberal organization was similarly stimulated, and the election of 1831 registered the lowest non-partisan voting rate of all observed elections before 1837. The reform issue is taken to be “exogenous” or “predetermined” in this discussion in the sense that it caused organizational effort and increased party voting, rather than vice versa. More complete understanding of the political process might allow us to specify why those men who pushed reform onto the agenda did so when they did; but it seems unlikely that they were motivated by a desire to improve party organization *per se*, or were reacting to the current levels of party voting.⁵

Badly beaten in 1831, the Conservatives suffered their worst defeat in history in 1832, the first election held under the new electoral system. The issue of parliamentary reform dominated in 1832 as it had in 1831, but now as a retrospective rather than a prospective consideration. The enormous reformist majority in the 1832–35 Parliament, while agreed on the issue of parliamentary reform, was potentially divided on other issues. By May 1834, when Sir James Graham and Lord Stanley resigned from the Cabinet over the issue of appropriating surplus Irish church revenues to non-church purposes, the beginnings of a new cleavage on religious issues were visible. At the election of 1835, Graham and Stanley refused to commit themselves in advance to a course of support or opposition for a Conservative (or a Liberal) government, and in this they were probably followed by a number of moderate politicians: early in the next session, Stanley’s short-lived party, the “Derby Dilly,” consisted of fifty to sixty members. The higher non-partisan voting rates in 1835 may reflect the uncertainty over party alignments at this time.

After the election of 1835, a number of major issues of reform fueled the party battle, including relief of the civil disabilities of Dissenters, reform of municipal corporations, and reform of the English and Irish established churches. Most of these issues tapped the underlying sectarian division between Anglicans and Dissenters, which now formed the basis of a fairly sharp and sustained two-party cleavage. As noted above, Bonham assumed full-time duties as electoral agent for the Conservatives after the election of 1835, and in the next six years aided in the establishment of local associations throughout the country. The party’s central fund, which had been quite small in 1832 and 1835, increased in 1837

⁵Certainly Victorian political leaders attempted to control the issue agenda in order to preserve or expand their coalitions, so that sometimes the direction of causality was reversed. But in general I think it is valid to view issues as bulls in a china shop – endogenous to the shop as a whole but somewhat exogenous to the china shop owner.

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

and was quite large by 1841 (Pinto-Duschinsky 1981: 21).⁶ Non-partisan voting rates declined in 1837 and by 1841 were lower than in any election down to 1868. The work of Close (1969) and Aydelotte (1962–63) shows that a similar tightening of party lines took place in Parliament. The Conservatives in 1841 were the first party in British history to force their leaders into office against the wishes of the Crown by winning a majority in a general election.

This growing two-party system was broken by the issue of protection in the 1841–47 Parliament. Support for repeal of the Corn Laws cut squarely athwart the Conservative party, and a period of multi-party confusion and low discipline in Parliament followed, coinciding with a recurrence of non-partisan voting in the constituencies. Political historians all speak of the hiatus in party politics in the 1846–67 period and remark upon the lack of any sharp policy differences between the parties. The agenda in the 20 years after the repeal of the Corn Laws was largely negative, aimed at preventing the schemes of the Radicals in the House from coming to fruition. As noted in Chapter 8, there was an explicit agreement between Derby and Palmerston to this effect, and the effort was perhaps aided by the prosperity of the nation in the 1850s and 1860s. Despite the absence of obvious policy differences, the Conservative organization seems to have recovered in the late 1850s and 1860s. The Conservative central fund, which fell off greatly in the elections of 1847 and 1852, was modest in 1857 and exceptionally large in 1859. Organization in the constituencies probably also recovered at this time, if Rose's boast quoted earlier had a basis in fact. In any case, party voting in the constituencies clearly recovered in 1859 and 1865. Palmerston died soon after the 1865 election, and the agitation that had begun in 1859 finally culminated two years later in the second Reform Act. Issues of reform, pushed onto the agenda chiefly by the Radical wing of the Liberal party, served to define or redefine party boundaries. The growing Radical contingent, made possible by the expansion of the electorate, moved toward radical reform; their proposals, now with the authority of substantial numbers in the House of Commons – and no longer safely bottled up by a conspiracy between the leadership of the two parties – demarcated the real political cleavages, making the position of the Whigs in the Liberal party anomalous. A prophetic article in 1880 on “The Unstable Equilibrium of Parties” highlighted this anomaly, decrying the “unnatural” division of moderate conservative politicians between the two great parties. The author noted that whereas “nine out of ten Liberals were until a quite recent period at one with their Conservative opponents in professing

⁶References to party funds in the following paragraph are also based on Pinto-Duschinsky (1981).

The electorate

a desire to maintain the general framework of English institutions,” the fact that the recent election had for the first time given the “new radicalism” a predominant position in the Liberal party meant that the Whigs were actually closer in feeling to the Conservatives than to the ruling faction of their own party. The author hopefully predicted that this could not last and that the Whigs as a body would break off and join the Conservatives (Wilson 1880). As soon as an appropriate excuse – or last straw – appeared in the form of Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill in 1886, this in fact happened.

Except for the period 1857–65, where there is no obvious set of issues dominating political discussion, the short-term fluctuations of the party system are intelligible as responses to the stimulus of a relatively few issues of fundamental importance. There is still the question, however, of why each reform period seems to have had a characteristic level and variability of party organization and party voting.

THE EXTENSION OF THE SUFFRAGE

The most likely contributors to the periodization of the party system are of course the Reform Acts. The introduction after 1832 of permanent registration in the counties and annual registration in the boroughs, for example, clearly sparked the creation of an entirely new species of organization – the registration societies (Thomas 1950). In this section, we shall concentrate on the extension of the suffrage. Each Reform Act opened the way for a sizable expansion of the electorate – by 50–80% after 1832, 88% after 1867, 76% after 1884 – and each increase in the electorate had important effects on party organization, on parliamentary discipline, and on party voting in the electorate.

Party organization

The impact on party organization is perhaps the most widely appreciated. Weber (1946), Duverger (1955), LaPalombara and Weiner (1966), and others stress that party organization has typically followed the expansion of the suffrage in western democracies.

It should be noted, however, that size alone does not determine the usefulness of organization. This point is brought home most forcefully by contrasting the state of party organization in the counties and in the boroughs. Although county constituencies were far larger on average than boroughs, organization there was less developed. As late as 1874, for example, only 46% of the English county districts had Conservative associations, whereas 67% of the boroughs did.⁷

⁷On page 20 of his *Elections and Party Management*, H. J. Hanham states that in

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

The explanation for this contrast lies chiefly in the greater frequency of political battles in the towns. Only in the towns was registration annual. Thus, only there could organization pay dividends every year at the revision courts. Only in the towns were there local elections. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, which replaced self-perpetuating corporations by elected councils in 184 English boroughs, meant that political organization could be useful also at the annual municipal elections. Finally, only in the towns were parliamentary elections fairly often contested. At general elections between 1852 and 1865, for example, 63% of the boroughs were contested on average, as opposed to only 29% of the counties (Lloyd 1965). In the counties, much political effort was spent in avoiding the great cost of actually going to the poll.

Interestingly, all three extensions of the suffrage in the nineteenth century coincided with considerable increases in the number and proportion of contested parliamentary elections. Whereas only 27% of English constituencies were contested on average at the five general elections held between 1812 and 1830 (Mitchell 1967: 116), this figure jumped to 59% for the nine elections held after 1832, to 80% after 1867, and to 86% after 1885.

In part, this increasing tendency to contest parliamentary elections was due to the replacement of small with large boroughs. In the three elections before 1832, for example, only 14% of the boroughs disfranchised by the first Reform Act were contested on average. In contrast, over 90% of the newly enfranchised double-member boroughs were contested in the three elections immediately after 1832.

More generally, the increasing proportion of contested elections may have been due to the extension of the suffrage and the greater uncertainty about election outcomes that this produced. In nineteenth century England, the candidates paid all official election expenses, in addition to such costs as transporting, treating, and bribing voters. Consequently, it was not uncommon for candidates to withdraw and avoid the expense of polling day if, after a few weeks of campaigning, they were convinced that their chances of securing a seat were not good. When results could be forecast accurately, candidates knew – at least with a high degree of certainty – who would win if the contest were pushed to a poll. Thus, the candidate who expected to lose could cut his losses by withdrawing.

1874 there were “Conservative associations in only forty-four of the eighty-two English county divisions,” indicating that thirty-eight had no associations. Using the same document upon which Hanham bases himself, however – indeed, using a copy of the document provided by Hanham – I have counted thirty-eight county divisions *with* associations, and forty-four *without*. Professor Hanham has suggested in a personal communication that the figures were transposed when *Elections and Party Management* was first put through the press.

The electorate

When the electorate expanded and elections could not be forecast as accurately, however, the subjective estimates that candidates formed as to the probability that they would win were probably higher for “challengers” and lower for “front-runners.” On this ground, one might expect more contests in larger constituencies. One might expect this as well on the ground that larger constituencies were more heterogeneous. On the other hand, more electors also meant a greater election expense, and on this ground one might expect fewer contests in larger constituencies.

Cross-sectionally, the evidence is that larger constituencies were more frequently contested – at least among boroughs. Between 1859 and 1880, for example, the average number of general election contests among boroughs with fewer than 1,000 electors was 3.52, while the figure stood at 3.60, 3.87, and 4.05 for boroughs with 1,000–2,000, 2,000–3,000, and more than 3,000 electors, respectively. There is at least some reason, then, to attribute the increasing frequency of contests to the growth of the electorate.⁸

Evidence of the impact on organization of frequency of contest and size of constituency can be garnered from the census of party associations conducted by the Conservative Central Office in 1874. According to this census, only 22% of English boroughs with fewer than 1,000 registered electors had Conservative associations, whereas 46% of boroughs with 1,000–1,999 electors, and 87% of boroughs with 2,000 or more electors, had associations. The effect of size and electoral competition jointly on party organization is suggested by the figures in Table 10.1. This table divides the 183 English boroughs into several classes, based on size of registered electorate and number of general election contests between 1859 and 1880, and gives for each class the percentage which had Conservative associations. Among the smaller boroughs (fewer than 3,000 electors), those which were frequently contested were from 10% to 30% more likely to have a Conservative association than those which were infrequently contested. The impact of size was even greater, both for frequently and infrequently contested places.

Parliamentary discipline

The effect of the extension of the suffrage on the second of the three sectors of the party system – the parliamentary parties – was indirect. A

⁸Lloyd attributes the increase in contested elections over the second half of the nineteenth century to “an altered attitude to elections. An eighteenth-century candidate would not have run in a constituency where he had no hope; he could do himself no good, and he might do harm to his social position by pushing in where he was not wanted. By 1910 contesting a hopeless seat was accepted as a way for a politician to earn the gratitude of his party” (Lloyd 1965: 265).

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

Table 10.1. *Percentage of English boroughs having local Conservative organizations in 1874, by size and competitiveness*

Number of registered electors	Number of contests 1859–80	
	3 or less	4 or 5
<1,000	15.4 (13) ^a	28.6 (14)
1,000–1,999	26.3 (19)	58.6 (29)
2,000–2,999	80.0 (5)	100.0 (10)
>3,000	87.1 (31)	85.5 (62)

^aThe figures in parentheses are the number of boroughs in each cell. Thus, for example, there were 13 boroughs which had fewer than 1,000 registered electors in 1874 and experienced three or fewer contests in the period 1859–80. Of these, two, or 15.4%, had local Conservative associations in 1874.

larger electorate prompted greater reliance on party labels as a method of communicating with voters, as will be discussed later. As a consequence, the party label and what it stood for acquired greater importance. But the electoral payoff to candidates from stressing their partisan ties depended on their party's reputation with voters, which in turn depended both on what the party stood for and on its ability to deliver those policy benefits it had promised. Hence, the party's reputation for being disciplined enough to enact its programme began to affect the electoral fortunes of all its members. Voting against one's party was no longer a completely private matter, and discipline became more and more what economists refer to as a collective or public good. The consequences of this are discussed in Chapter 11.

Party voting in the electorate

The growing size of constituencies affected more than the party organization and the party-in-government: the whole manner of conducting elections, and hence the behavior of the party-in-the-electorate, was also affected. As the electorate grew, the amount of information that candidates could convey about themselves to ordinary voters dwindled, unless they were prepared to make much greater efforts than had formerly been necessary. While candidates in the smaller boroughs were wont personally to canvass all of their constituents – at least until the Ballot Act in 1872 – candidates in the larger constituencies, while perhaps aiming in principle for equally extensive coverage, fell more or less short; such candidates had to rely more on newspapers and, increasingly, the party label in order to communicate something about themselves. Significantly, the terms “Conservative” and “Liberal” first came into common usage in the 1830s,

The electorate

Table 10.2. Correlation between split voting and number of voters

Type of constituency	Number of candidates	Correlation between SV and NV	
		1832–65	1868–80
Borough	3	-.22* (376)	-.28* (55)
Borough	4	-.13 (124)	-.29* (58)
County	3	.02 (83)	-.23 (48)
County	4	-.31 (15)	-.31 (27)

Note. There were 376 three-candidate contests in boroughs in the period 1832–65. The correlation between the split voting rate and the number of voters for these contests was -.22. The asterisk indicates that this correlation is significant at the .05 level.

and their open use and avowal by candidates increased with time. Whereas politicians in the age of Peel “did not as a rule talk of being members of a party,” instead striving to give the “appearance of being independent and unfettered in their parliamentary conduct” (Gash 1982: 156), by the elections of 1868–80 a majority of politicians openly avowed their partisan affiliations.⁹

The consequences for party voting are fairly clear. As the electorate expanded, a larger proportion of those voting found themselves with little information about the candidates beyond their names and party labels. For these voters, voting a straight party ticket was quite natural, if they were going to vote at all, since they had no real basis on which to distinguish between members of the same party.

Lacking any direct evidence on the quality of information possessed by Victorian electors, it is difficult to assess the importance of the foregoing argument. The potential informational differences between 300 and 30,000 electors seem large, but what of the differences between 300 and 3,000? Some indirect evidence on this question is afforded by the rates of split voting observed in different-sized constituencies between 1832 and 1880.

Two points should be made. First, there is definitely some, albeit modest, evidence that larger constituencies had lower split voting rates. The simple correlation between the total number of voters participating in an election and the split voting rate is $-.33$ (significant at the .001 level) for contests held between 1832 and 1880. Even if type of constituency (borough or county), type of contest (two-against-one or two-against-two), and time period (before or after 1867) are controlled for, the correlation remains negative (with one exception; see Table 10.2).

⁹I base this statement upon my own reading of a hundred or so election addresses in the 1868–80 period.

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

Table 10.3. *Split voting in borough contests with three candidates*

Number of voters	Split voting rate	
	1832–65	1868–80
<1,000	23.6 (221)	No data
1,999–2,000	21.2 (85)	11.0 (15)
2,999–3,000	19.8 (36)	11.4 (6)
>3,000	12.0 (34)	6.2 (34)

Note: There were 221 three-candidate contests in boroughs with fewer than 1,000 voters in the period 1832–65. The average split voting rate in these contests was 23.6.

Looked at in terms of averages, a similar story is told: for example, the average split voting rate before 1867 in three-candidate borough contests with fewer than 1,000 electors was 23.6%, whereas it was only 12.0% in otherwise similar contests with more than 3,000 electors (see Table 10.3).¹⁰

Second, although size did affect split voting rates as the informational hypothesis would predict, size alone falls far short of explaining the trends in split voting. One indication of this is the decline of split voting rates within classes of equally sized boroughs. For example, the split voting rate in boroughs with between 1,000 and 2,000 voters fell from 21.2% before 1867 to 11.0% after (Table 10.3). Obviously, something other than size must be invoked to explain this decline. Indeed, if the enlargement of constituencies is the only factor considered, one would expect a decline in the average level of split voting in three-candidate borough contests from 21.6% to 15.4%. The actual decline was considerably greater, to 8.1%.¹¹ Another indication of the inadequacy of size as an explanation of split voting is the lack of any measurable tendency for increases in size and decreases in split voting to covary at the constituency level. Only 36 boroughs in the sample had data for three-candidate contests both before and after 1867. For each of these boroughs, the average number of voters and average split voting rates were calculated for each of the periods 1832–65 and 1868–80. The correlation between (1) how much the borough's electorate had increased from the period 1832–65 to 1868–80 and (2) how much the split voting rate had decreased was insignificant and of the wrong sign. The same is true of the boroughs in the sample which had four-candidate contests before and after 1867. The

¹⁰The correlation between non-partisan plumping and number of voters was not as consistently negative – especially before 1867.

¹¹Similar statements hold regarding four-candidate borough contests and county contests.

The electorate

bottom line is that the measured impact of size was moderate at best.¹² A complete explanation of the decline and periodization of split voting rates must include other factors. The next section will attempt to do this.

THE CABINET AND THE ELECTORATE

If the predominance of the House of Commons has been lessened by a delegation of authority to the Cabinet, it has been weakened also by the transfer of power directly to the electorate. The two tendencies are not, indeed, unconnected. The transfer of power to the electorate is due in part to the growing influence of the Ministers, to the recognition that policy is mainly directed, not by Parliament, but by them. The Cabinet now rules the nation by and with the advice and consent of Parliament; and for that very reason the nation wishes to decide what Cabinet it shall be that rules. (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 437)

Sheer numbers of voters and the organizational and informational problems posed by a mass electorate do help to explain the periodization of English voting behavior in the nineteenth century. But the expansion of the electorate and its effects must be understood within the context of nineteenth century parliamentary government. The current United States electorate is, after all, many times larger than the Victorian English electorate, yet the frequency of split returns to the United States Senate since 1950 – to take but one indicator – shows that United States Senators benefit from a sizable personal vote. The fundamental reason why the personal vote for MPs is so much smaller than that for members of the United States Congress is that MPs have so much less impact on the determination of policy – both distributive and general. The key element in understanding the decline in non-partisan voting across the nineteenth century is an appreciation of the loss of policy initiative by the backbench MP.

In the early 1800s, one finds a relatively small active membership in the House of Commons operating essentially by unanimous consent (in this respect, reminiscent of the U.S. Senate). As described in Chapter 6, backbench MPs took a prominent part in the initiation and debate of major pieces of legislation, and an array of parliamentary rights ensured that their policy concerns would find a place on the agenda. Beginning in the 1830s, however, the role of the private member in public legislation began seriously to erode. By the 1860s, if not sooner, the centralization of legislative power in the Cabinet was an accomplished and recognized fact.

Moreover, the decline of the private member's status was by no means

¹²Even had the relationship between size and split voting been stronger, there would still be some question as to whether the informational hypothesis was the correct one. Smaller boroughs tended to be more corrupt, after all, so that the covariation might be explained on that basis.

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

confined to matters of national policy. In general, the kinds of legislation one most readily associates with individual legislators fall in the area of what Lowi has called distributive policy, concerned with the allocation of geographically divisible benefits, such as capital projects and grants for the establishment or support of local services (Lowi 1964). Indeed, one of the most widely observed behavioral regularities of geographically based legislators is the provision of “particularistic” or divisible benefits to their constituents. It is natural to suppose that Victorian MPs also performed such services, and that they were valued for their ability to do so.

Yet, here also Victorian backbenchers suffered a decline. This is especially evident when contrasted with the American experience. The mainstays of the U.S. Congressman’s particularistic usefulness to his constituents have been, at various times, tariff bills, Civil Service patronage, and local improvement bills. Each of these areas was largely shut off from the influence of the private member of Parliament by the mid-nineteenth century.

First, tariff bills, which with their many separate rates for different industries proved ideal vehicles for log-rolling in the U.S. Congress until the 1930s, simply did not exist in Britain after the definitive triumph of free trade in the 1840s. Second, the local Civil Service patronage of which the member of Parliament disposed declined throughout the nineteenth century. Positions in the revenue, postal, and other geographically dispersed branches of the Civil Service were regularly referred to the recommendation of the local member in the early part of the century. However, patronage in the revenue departments began to decline with Lord Liverpool’s renunciation in 1820 of the direct appointment of superior offices in the Customs Service; and the reforms initiated by the Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1853), and furthered by Gladstone’s Order in Council establishing open competition (1870), cut back the patronage throughout the Civil Service. The last bits of local patronage – the provincial postmasterships – were turned over to the surveyors of the postal districts in 1896 (Lowell 1912, vol. i: 170).

A third area of distributive politics largely closed to the private member was the pork barrel. Whereas local improvement bills have long been a feature of American politics, the use of national resources for the benefit of particular places was largely avoided in Victorian England. Expenditure on the traditional bulwarks of the American pork barrel – rivers and harbors, railways, roads, dams and canals – was almost nonexistent. Except for expenditures on “harbours of refuge” and in the half dozen boroughs where the state’s ship-building works were maintained, and where the solicitude of the local members for such expenditures was proverbial, the government spent no money upon harbors. Neither canals

The electorate

nor roads nor railroads were constructed by the crown (Lowell 1912, vol. ii: 514–19; vol. i: 367–93).

All told, it would seem that public legislation offered increasingly little for the backbench MP in the electoral arena. He could not claim to initiate or even significantly affect either general or distributive policy. Increasingly, one suspects, voters and MPs recognized this, and the policy role that constituents expected their MPs to fulfill became essentially that of an internal lobbyist, seeking to change the party line from within rather than to oppose it from without. This, at any rate, was the strategy adopted by a number of Liberal pressure groups in the 1860s and 1870s (Vincent 1966; Wootton 1975).

Roughly concomitant with the decline of the individual MP in the arena of public legislation came a striking change in procedure on private legislation. As discussed in Chapter 2, the role of the locally interested MP underwent a complete transformation. Whereas in the eighteenth century private bills were handled entirely by MPs who had either a personal or a constituency-based interest in the matter, by 1844 railway bills and by 1855 all private bills were controlled by small committees of disinterested members. These changes greatly altered the character of private bill procedure and limited the services which an MP could render to local interests. Earlier in the nineteenth century, and throughout the eighteenth century, a significant part of the job of many MPs was to steer through Parliament private bills in their constituents' or patron's (or indeed, their own) interest. The MP generally prepared and introduced the bill, and often reported it from committee (Beer 1966: 25–28; Beckett 1982). After the removal of interested members from the crucial committee stage, however, and the previous introduction of paid agents to prepare the bills, there was not nearly so much that the member could do to defeat or promote such bills. In committee, the proceeding was judicial; out of committee, it was handled mostly by a registered agent retained for the purpose by the party promoting the bill (and MPs could not be agents); only at stages occurring in the House could the member be useful, and then he was but one voice in a large assembly.

The general picture that emerges is quite clear. By the 1860s the individual MP was a relatively unimportant cog in the legislative machinery. Elections earlier in the century may well have turned on the ability of candidates to affect general policy and to provide distributive benefits (and of course on the question of to whom in the constituency these benefits were allocated). With the important changes in private and public bill procedure, however, the policy foundation of the individual candidate's electoral importance was eroding, and the consequences of this were far-reaching. Newspapers, whether in pursuit of increased circulation or of "newsworthy" events, naturally focused on what was in-

Causes of a party-oriented electorate

creasingly the sole hub of action: the front benches and the party leaders who sat there. Contributors gave increasingly to the parties – or so one might infer from the increasing size of central party funds (Pinto-Duschinsky 1981: 21). MPs themselves saw the necessity to openly affiliate with a party – for if one was not a member of a party, in what sense could one deliver any policy benefits at all to constituency elites or voters generally? Consequently, constituency elites and voters generally began to view the franchise more as a means to affect the partisan control of the executive than as a means to choose between individual representatives. As the overall value of a seat in Parliament came to be dominated by its particular value in contributing to the “election” of a Prime Minister, the striking of deals in the constituencies across party lines became less appealing.¹³ More and more, the individual MP, “like a delegate to the electoral college for the election of an American President,” was “returned primarily as a tied voter for a potential Prime Minister” (Campion 1952: 65).

SUMMARY

It has long been the accepted textbook view that twentieth century British voters tend to regard their vote more as a means to control or express an opinion of the executive than as a means to select a particular individual to represent them. Thus, voters make their choices not on the basis of the personal or policy characteristics of the individual candidates, but rather with an eye to the candidates’ party affiliation and the record of the party leaders who will form the government. It is not hard to understand why voters should behave in this fashion in the twentieth century: MPs have little or no influence over the policy process independent of their party leaders; they generally have no electoral organization of their own with which to woo voters, and have little control over campaign finances; and they can deliver little in the way of particularized benefits to their constituents.

If one reverts to the English polity of, say, the 1810s, the situation is completely altered. The prevailing view at that time was that the government’s duty was not legislative but, rather, administrative. The individual member of Parliament still enjoyed a number of formidable procedural rights, and was still looked to for the introduction of major

¹³It would seem that the politics of multi-member seats before control of the Cabinet became the key to control of public legislation was rather similar to the politics of portfolio distribution in European governments. Coalitions of a sufficient size to win all the seats were forged, the seats being distributed to the members of the winning coalition. When a seat in Parliament came to have value chiefly as a vote for a Prime Minister or Cabinet, it was more difficult to forge cross-party coalitions in the constituencies.

The electorate

legislation. Individual candidates fashioned their own electoral organizations and were responsible for financing their own campaigns in an era when no limits on expenditure were enforced by the state. Finally, the private bill procedure then in use allowed individual MPs considerable influence in the disposition of such local improvements as canals, enclosures, and turnpike roads. Given these differences, did voters weigh the personal characteristics and policy commitments of the candidates more heavily in their voting decisions?

The previous chapter has provided the statistical wherewithal to answer that question, and the more general question of when English voters began to vote for parties rather than men. Based on an analysis of over a thousand election contests held between 1818 and 1918, it demonstrates that English voting behavior changed markedly during the course of the nineteenth century. In particular, it shows that the frequency with which English voters in double-member districts split their votes between the major parties declined considerably and permanently in the period 1857–68. Whereas nearly a quarter of all electors in double-member districts split their votes in 1847, and nearly a fifth in 1857, by 1868 only 5.5% did so, and the figure never exceeded 5% thereafter. Voting for the party rather than for the man appears to be the dominant feature of English electoral behavior from 1868 onwards.

The development of a party-oriented electorate in the mid-Victorian period was based chiefly on the prior erosion of the powers of individual MPs in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. The private MP had become insignificant in the determination of policy – whether of a general or a local nature – by the 1860s, and voters responded to this by using their votes to determine what did matter: party control of the executive. It is important to note that the changes in electoral organization after the second Reform Act, the limitation and centralization of campaign finance after the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883, and the development of highly disciplined parliamentary parties in the 1870s all came well after the procedural decline of the private member and after the bulk of the change in electoral behavior. These events, it is suggested, should be viewed as postscripts, logical consequences and reinforcements of the fundamental changes in parliamentary procedure and electoral behavior. In the next two chapters this suggestion, at least as it pertains to the development of party discipline in the House of Commons, is pursued.

II

The legislative consequences of a party-oriented electorate

Chapter 9 provided clear statistical evidence of the increasing electoral importance of party. We turn now to an investigation of the legislative consequences of this change. Since the analysis focuses on the responses of individual MPs to altered electoral conditions, a necessary preliminary question is whether MPs noticed any change.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE ELECTORATE

Very few of them had seen the three last elections without feelings of anxiety and concern. He did not like to see these big turn-over majorities: they were unpleasant: they showed great instability in the public mind.

(Leonard Courtney speaking in the House of Commons, 1880)¹

The perception by nineteenth century MPs of why their constituents voted the way they did is clearly not a subject on which definitive statements can be made. Yet it is necessary, if we are to argue that the change in electoral orientation had any direct effect on legislative behavior, to say something about how MPs perceived the electoral parameters within which they acted. Did Victorian politicians know when electors were voting for parties and when they were voting for men? In particular, did contemporaries in the late 1860s and 1870s know or believe that voters were becoming more party-oriented and less candidate-oriented?²

One approach to answering these questions is to look at the trends over time in the number of election contests with only three candidates. In its simplest form, the decision on the part of a prospective candidate

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, cclii, 271.

² Certainly one can find assertions to this effect in the historical literature. Feuchtwanger, for example, writes that after passage of the second Reform Act, “public opinion at large was more and more focused on the activities of the national leaders,” and that “MPs were watching this process and reporting it to their leaders” (Feuchtwanger 1968: 219).

The electorate

Table 11.1. *Number of candidates at contested elections in double-member English provincial boroughs, 1835–1900*

Year	Number of candidates				Ratio of column 3 to column 2
	3	4	5	6	
1835	73	25	2	0	.34
1837	62	39	2	0	.63
1841	51	37	0	0	.73
1847	54	26	3	0	.48
1852	60	33	5	0	.55
1857	62	19	2	0	.31
1859	51	30	0	0	.59
1865	63	29	2	0	.46
1868	38	30	3	1	.79
1874	24	47	2	3	1.96
1880	31	45	1	0	1.45
1885	7	13	0	0	1.86
1886	5	14	0	0	2.80
1892	6	13	0	0	2.17
1895	5	12	2	1	2.40
1900	4	13	0	0	3.25

Source: Compiled by the author from the data of Craig (1974; 1977).

to contest a given constituency presumably depended on the value of a seat, the cost of an election campaign, and the probability of victory. If contemporaries believed that voters were becoming more party-oriented, then the estimated chances of a candidate should have depended more on his party label and less on his personal characteristics. If one candidate of a given party stood a good chance of winning, in other words, so should others have stood good chances. Thus, increasingly, whenever one member of a party thought a particular (double-member) constituency was worth fighting, there ought to have been another candidate of the same party who thought so too.³ The proportion of two-against-one contests should have declined, and the proportion of two-against-two contests should have increased.

This did in fact happen. As can be seen in Table 11.1, the number of four-candidate contests increased considerably relative to the number of three-candidate contests after the second Reform Act. Moreover, looked at more carefully, the figures in the last column fall into a familiar pattern: the ratio of four- to three-candidate contests increased from 1835 to

³This presumes that other things were constant – in particular, that differences in the valuation of seats and in the expectation of costs between candidates of the same party did not also change with time.

Consequences of a party-oriented electorate

1841, fell in 1847–57, recovered in 1859 (although falling back in 1865), and reached all-time highs in 1868, 1874, and 1886. This is the pattern one would expect if contemporaries accurately forecast the levels of non-partisan voting in each year, and made the appropriate decision as to whether to run one or two candidates: running one when there was a significant chance of garnering split vote support, running two when it looked like electors would be casting party votes.

In addition to the campaigning evidence, there were several striking innovations in political argumentation in the late 1860s and 1870s which implicitly recognized the growing electoral importance of party and party government. In modern Britain, by-elections are routinely viewed as judgments of the government's policy and administration, and general elections are interpreted chiefly as selections of which party shall govern next. Implicitly, such views presume that voters are party-oriented rather than candidate-oriented, and in this regard the increasing acceptance of similar interpretations in the late 1860s and 1870s is an important clue to the attitude of contemporaries about electoral behavior.

Gladstone's justification of his dissolution of Parliament in 1874 is an instructive example. Responding in the House of Commons to charges that the dissolution had been "an elaborate surprise," Gladstone vindicated his conduct by pointing out that by-elections had been going against the government in the month before his decision, that on this ground he had been justified in inferring that popular opinion was against the government, and that, since no government could legitimately govern in that day without popular support, he was thereby obliged to afford "the people of this country an opportunity of pronouncing their opinion upon the conduct of affairs."⁴ Gladstone was the first Premier to justify a dissolution on the basis of trends in by-elections. Implicit in his interpretation of by-elections (and, indeed, of general elections) was the assumption that they turned chiefly on the conduct of the government – and not on local jealousies or the particular actions of individual MPs. This assumption appeared again, in a peculiarly strong form, in W. S. Saunders's book-length attempt to explain the Liberal victory in 1880. The central premise of Saunders's argument was that the by-elections held just before the general election had revealed the Beaconsfield ministry to be popular, and that as it then lost the election, its defeat could only be attributed to events that took place between the by-elections and the general appeal to the country (Saunders 1880).

A similar assumption concerning general elections – viz., that they represented national choices of a government, and were not just a number of unconnected contests determined by local issues – appeared clearly in

⁴*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxviii, 79–85.

The electorate

two important precedents: one in parliamentary practice, one in the theory of the constitution. When Disraeli saw the election results in 1868, he resigned office before meeting Parliament. Although this upset some members, who would have preferred that he follow the established procedure of seeking his fortune at the hands of the Commons, Disraeli felt that meeting Parliament and being immediately defeated on a matter of confidence (as was surely his fate) would be a simple waste of time; the election results having made a Liberal government inevitable, he resigned forthwith. Gladstone, in 1874, and Disraeli (now Lord Beaconsfield), in 1880, followed this precedent, and an article in the June 1880 *Contemporary Review* noted that these actions had established that “when a Ministry appeals to the country by a dissolution of Parliament, and when the elections show that the new House of Commons will certainly be unfavourable to the Ministry, that Ministry must resign, just as much as if the House of Commons itself had spoken” (Freeman 1880: 957).

The new power or function accorded to elections by the precedents in 1868, 1874, and 1880 was extended even further by the doctrine of mandate. Although most political leaders denounced as too democratic the idea that election results bound ministries to take particular actions, the increasing specificity of proposals for reform in Liberal election addresses after 1867 allowed Gladstone’s government to claim that the decisive electoral verdict in 1868 had given it a mandate for certain reforms, notably the disestablishment of the Irish church (Hanham 1969: 201). These claims were supported by the Conservatives, albeit not without a strategic calculation. Lord Salisbury, who played the leading role in securing the acquiescence of the House of Lords to the disestablishment of the Irish church, was concerned at the time to find a viable position for the Lords in the constitution. He explained his motivation for accepting the Liberal pretensions to a mandate in a letter to Lord Carnarvon:

The plan which I prefer is frankly to acknowledge that the nation is our Master, though the House of Commons is not, and to yield our own opinion only when the judgment of the nation has been challenged at the polls and decidedly expressed. This doctrine, it seems to me, has the advantage of being: (1) Theoretically sound. (2) Popular. (3) Safe against agitation, and (4) so rarely applicable as practically to place little fetter upon our independence.

(Cecil 1922, vol. ii: 26)

Although the attraction for Salisbury of a doctrine of mandate rested on a calculation that the voice of the people would rarely speak clearly, the recognition and use for Conservative purposes of the assumption that elections could express, not just a choice of government, but also a choice

Consequences of a party-oriented electorate

of policy, is clear. This assumption has since had a long and checkered career in British politics.

The other side of the interpretive coin that pictured elections as choices of a government, and even of a policy, was the increasing importance which evidently attached to the government's popularity. This is illustrated by contemporary estimations of the likely electoral impact of Lord Beaconsfield's diplomatic success at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Beaconsfield, proclaiming that he had secured "peace with honour," was given an enthusiastic popular welcome on returning from Berlin, and in the Commons secured an extraordinarily large majority of 143 in favor of the treaties. Morley wrote that "it was the common talk at the moment that if Lord Beaconsfield had only chosen to dissolve, his majority would have been safe" (Lloyd 1968: 11). The Cabinet sat for three hours on August 10 discussing the possibility, this being the first time that a government had contemplated an early election (the Parliament had over two years remaining) purely as a means of securing a party majority, and without having suffered any legislative or administrative setback in Parliament (Mackintosh 1962: 178–79). Presumably, the ministers reckoned that Beaconsfield's foreign policy success would have a strong positive effect in most constituencies; this anticipated effect was large enough to make them sanguine about their chances, and willing seriously to consider trading the more than two years of tenure which remained to them for a probability of a seven-year renewal.

Along with the belief that a government's popularity might carry its followers to victory went the complementary belief that a government's unpopularity might drag its adherents down to defeat. These beliefs were given added zest by the magnitude of the Conservative victory in 1874, and by the even larger Liberal victory in 1880. The change in the party composition of the House of Commons due to the 1874 election was significantly larger than that due to any election since 1835, and the change in 1880 set a new record: for the first time, a shift of well over a hundred seats was registered. Both these elections startled contemporaries, and there was much comment on the new volatility of the electoral system (Freeman 1880; Kebbel 1880).

The second Reform Act had generated tremendous uncertainty as to how the electoral system would react to an infusion of working class electors; it was Disraeli's "leap in the dark," what Carlyle styled "shooting niagra" (Carlyle 1867). The results of 1874 and 1880, coming after another basic structural change, the Ballot Act in 1872, did nothing to reassure members. The dire predictions of the Adullamites about the unhappy consequences of a democratic electorate were brought home, although perhaps not quite as advertised, to many MPs: In 1874 and

The electorate

1880, more borough incumbents went down to defeat than in any other election from 1835 through 1900, with almost a third of those facing a contest failing to secure election.⁵ The swing from one party to the other, which became more uniform after 1867,⁶ also became considerably larger in average value. In English two-member boroughs, the mean swing to the Conservatives from 1865 to 1868 was larger (in absolute value) than that for any pair of elections since 1832–35, and the figure advanced to a new high in 1868–74.⁷

What was the position of MPs in 1880, then? They had seen three sharp party battles in 1868, 1874, and 1880, with the lines drawn more clearly than they had been since the 1840s. After each of these elections, the defeated Prime Minister had resigned without meeting Parliament, and these precedents had established as constitutional a practice which tacitly recognized that the function of elections was not so much to choose individual members as to choose a government. Members had seen electoral tides higher than they had ever been before, pushing more uniformly in one direction than they every had before, and beaching more craft than they ever had before. A Premier, in the course of justifying a dissolution to the House, had clearly interpreted by-elections as referenda on the conduct of the government, rather than individual choices of members. If they cared to look, they found that proportionately fewer electors in the two-member districts were casting split votes and non-partisan plumpers, and that support for MPs in these districts now came increasingly from electors who cast straight party ballots. Had they searched, they would have found fewer colleagues from double-member districts of different party; and, in general, they would have found fewer MPs from these districts whose electoral experience had been anything other than what one would expect on the assumption that voters were becoming more party-oriented.

⁵See Table 7.1.

⁶T. J. Nossiter (1975) and D. Fraser (1976) computed the standard deviation of the swings to the Conservatives in English two-member boroughs for each adjacent pair of elections from 1832 to 1880. The standard deviation is a measure of the uniformity of swing across districts and can be interpreted as tapping the importance of national events in local electoral politics. Both found a decrease in the standard deviation of swings for election pairs after 1867.

⁷The electoral system had not seen such excitement since the agitation over the first Reform Act. Then, however, the excitement had died down; in the 1870s and 1880s, it did not. The average change in the number of seats held by the Conservatives at elections from 1835 through 1865 was 43.6, or 35.9 if we do not count 1835, which reflected the temporary reform agitation. In contrast, the corresponding figure for elections from 1868 through 1910 was 83.2, or 91.5 if we do not count the exceptional election of December 1910, which, coming less than a year after the previous election, registered no change in Conservative strength.

Consequences of a party-oriented electorate

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A POWERFUL CABINET AND A PARTY-ORIENTED ELECTORATE

The consequences of a powerful Cabinet and a more party-oriented electorate for party cohesion in Parliament were profound. In laying bare these consequences, the analogy with the American electoral college is helpful. The framers of the American Constitution evidently envisaged the electoral college as a body of experienced and sagacious men exercising their independent judgment in the selection of the executive. Very soon, however, it became customary for (1) candidates for the electoral college to pledge themselves to the support of a particular presidential nominee; (2) voters to vote a straight ticket; and (3) members of the electoral college to vote as they had pledged to, so that once the popular vote was in, the electoral vote was a foregone conclusion (Bryce 1913, vol. i: 41–44). The mistake the founding fathers made was to believe that voters would entrust a decision to others which they could make themselves. Since the electoral college did nothing but elect a president and vice-president, presidential electors had nothing to offer voters other than their vote intention. Thus, voters largely ignored all characteristics of electors beyond their stated presidential preferences. An unpledged candidate for the electoral college had little chance when there were sufficient quantities of pledged candidates, for every voter with a clear preference preferred an appropriately committed delegate to an uncommitted delegate. Once the college was assembled, delegates voted as they had promised in part because they had given a public pledge that would be costly to break and in part because each party had an incentive to ensure that those placed on the party's slate were in fact personally committed to the party's nominee. Thus "party cohesion" in the electoral college was and is virtually perfect.

Much in this sketch of the electoral college applies to the House of Commons as well. Although MPs did and still do more than merely select an executive team, nonetheless as the power of the executive grew relative to that of private members, the electoral function of the Commons began to overshadow its other functions. Bagehot recognized this clearly in 1865 when he stressed that "the main function of the House of Commons is [as] an electoral chamber; it is the assembly which chooses our President" (Bagehot 1914: 198). Candidates unaffiliated with one of the major parties were unpledged on the single most important issue – the control of the Cabinet – and increasingly had little chance against candidates who were pledged on this issue: for, just as in elections to the electoral college, every voter with a clear preference as to control of the executive preferred an appropriately committed candidate to an uncom-

The electorate

mitted candidate. As Bagehot noted, again in 1865: “Members are mostly, perhaps, elected because they will vote for a particular Ministry, rather than for purely legislative reasons” (Bagehot 1914: 92). As a consequence of this – as a consequence of the fact that voters were increasingly executive-oriented – candidates began to affiliate themselves more and more openly with one of the major parties: with one of those collective entities which might credibly secure control of the Cabinet. The increasing willingness of MPs to use party labels, then, stemmed not just from the increasing size of the electorate, as suggested in the last chapter, but also from the aggrandizement of the Cabinet.

As voters became more party-oriented and the use of party labels by candidates came into more general and more frank use, several important consequences followed within Parliament. A party-oriented electorate, which evaluated parties partly on the ability of the leadership to enact a legislative program and to marshal united forces to the task, made a party’s cohesion a collective good for its members: they all benefitted when the leadership looked competent and forceful, and they all suffered when it looked hapless. Consequently, both potential dissidents and party leaders had an incentive to reconcile their differences privately, and to avoid public disagreement. Interestingly, it is soon after the third Reform Act, according to Berrington (1967–68), that the English parties first began serious and regular efforts to negotiate intra-party differences, rather than carrying them into the division lobbies. Berrington attributes this to the homogenization of the parties after the Home Rule controversy: leaders simply could no longer find crossbench support, and thus had to make sure that their own troops were in line and satisfied. Such a development of intra-party negotiation was also to be expected, however, because of the collective importance which discipline had acquired.

More generally, as the use of party labels increased, the labels themselves became increasingly important as collective symbols embodying the reputation and stock of the parties. Since the party labels were growing in electoral value, and since their value could be depreciated by indiscipline or incompetence, the parties had a clear incentive to take a larger role in screening candidates who sought to campaign under their banners. And it is precisely in the later 1870s and 1880s that specifically partisan control of nominations began:

As late as the general elections of 1868 and 1874, nearly all candidates offered themselves to the constituency, though some professed to do so in pursuance of requisitions emanating from the electors. In 1880 many – I think most – Liberal candidates in boroughs, and some in counties, were chosen by the local party associations, and appealed to the Liberal electors on the ground of having been so chosen. (Bryce 1913, vol. ii: 81)

Consequences of a party-oriented electorate

The development of nomination by local party associations may have been facilitated by the desire of existing party members both to certify to the voters that they were members in good standing and to restrict competition from men arrogating to themselves the party label. In the absence of a method of officially designating party candidates, the danger existed that more than two candidates would campaign under a single party's label. There is some indication that this was a problem in 1868 and 1874: whereas an average of only 2.1% of contests in English provincial boroughs had five or more candidates before 1867, in 1868 fully 5.6% had five or more, and in 1874 6.6% had five or more. The desire to regulate the use of the label may thus have contributed to the movement toward formal nomination by local associations.

As to the consequences of nomination, a couple of points should be made. First, since the practice of local party nominations did not begin until the later 1870s and 1880s, it is largely outside of our purview. Second, however, even before local nomination was a recognized rite of campaigning, MPs had to worry about losing the party label. Even before nomination formalized the power, local associations or local leaders, or indeed the national leadership, might impugn the right of a particular MP to campaign as, say, a Conservative. *If the electorate was party-oriented*, this was a possibility to be taken seriously.

The possibility of losing the party imprimatur was probably not the most significant impetus toward discipline imparted to MPs in the 1860s and 1870s, however. What seems far more important, and has the added advantage of being testable, is the alteration in the relationship between MPs and their constituents that was brought about by the centralization of legislative authority in the Cabinet and the consequent focusing of electoral attention on the executive. The discussion will be facilitated if we imagine a hypothetical constituency with (at least) two kinds of electors: elite supporters, possibly financial backers, lenders of influence, and so on; and ordinary (but, in the sense of the previous chapter, independent) electors. The question is what level and kind of pressure MPs felt from their constituents when they voted in divisions.

Consider first the elite level, and suppose that on some particular issue(s) the local elite disagreed with the party leadership. As the Cabinet became more important, such disagreement between local elites and party leaders should have led to less dissidence, for three reasons. First, the local elites, just like MPs, had to recognize that certain issues might entail a dissolution or resignation. They, too, therefore, had to balance the merits of particular issues against the overall merits of the two major parties. Second, MPs who erred on the side of too little dissent for their elite supporters' tastes faced a lesser penalty as voters nation-wide became

The electorate

more party-oriented. Even if the local elite was essential to an MP's success in a particular constituency (having, in effect, a power of nomination), and used this power to ruin the MP's chances in his original constituency, he might look forward with increasing confidence to a good chance somewhere else. Both parties had since the 1830s placed prospective candidates on lists kept in the great London clubs, and the whips or party electoral agents were active throughout the post-reform period in finding constituencies for worthy party members. As the electorate became more party-oriented, this task became easier. Prospective candidates were increasingly fungible – they could be sent to a wider array of constituencies with less risk of being disqualified on purely local or personal grounds. Hence, any MP unfortunate enough actually to lose his seat because of his loyalty to the party leadership might expect not just effort but success in finding another suitable constituency. Third, MPs who erred on the side of too much dissent for their party leaders' tastes faced a larger penalty. Beyond the possibilities of dissolution and non-advancement there was the likelihood that the party would not help the MP find another constituency should he for any reason lose his current seat. Facing less pressure from local elites, a lesser penalty for displeasing local elites, and a greater penalty for displeasing the party leadership, MPs ought to have had less incentive to dissent when local elites and party leaders disagreed.

They should also have faced less pressure to dissent from the bulk of their constituents. First, even ordinary voters may have recognized the possibility of dissolution and resignation, and tempered their opinions on specific issues accordingly. Second, even if they did not, the sheer fact that they were party-oriented should have meant less pressure to dissent. In a nutshell, the argument is this: voters who based their votes chiefly on partisan preference necessarily based them less on the voting record of their own MP; thus, MPs generally felt less local pressure to vote against their party when party and constituency disagreed. An MP may still have derived some electoral benefit from dissenting when his constituents disagreed with his party, but if his constituents were intent on punishing the party, this did him little good since the only way in which punishment could be inflicted was by voting against the party's candidates. On the other hand, if the MP voted with his party on an issue opposed by his constituents, he may still have incurred some local wrath by that act, but if the overall record of his party pleased his constituents and that overall party record was what they voted for, he could afford to side with his party. What the MP did simply had less electoral impact relative to what the party as a whole did. When electoral pressures from constituents lessened, however, partisan pressures bulked relatively larger

Consequences of a party-oriented electorate

in the typical MP's calculations, and unless other things changed, he tended to support his party more frequently.

The upshot of these theoretical arguments is clear. We expect that dissidence due to local pressures should have declined in the 1860s and 1870s, as the primacy of the Cabinet was recognized, and voters became increasingly party-oriented. The next chapter tests this theoretical expectation. Of course, even if locally inspired dissidence did decline, this furnishes an adequate explanation of the overall rise in cohesion only to the extent that such dissidence was important. Accordingly, the next chapter also assesses the degree to which local pressures caused dissidence.

I 2

The influence of constituents in Victorian England

As the polypus takes its colour from the rock to which it affixes itself, so do the Members of this House take their character from the constituencies.

(Robert Lowe)¹

Historians differ widely on the importance of national issues in parliamentary elections during the nineteenth century. At least two strands of opinion tend to discount their importance. First, there is the view that elections were largely controlled by the influence of local elites, so that the meaningful expression of electoral opinion was confined to differences among the upper crust. Second, there is the view that parliamentary elections “were much more a drama enacted about the life of the town . . . than a means of expressing individual opinions about the matters of the day . . . the real issue was not the parliamentary representation of the borough, but the relative positions of the electors within the town” (Vincent 1966: xv). Clearly, to the extent that elections did turn chiefly on rivalries of the purely local kind suggested, their use in communicating the policy preferences of voters – even elite voters – was lessened.

In contrast both to the emphasis on influence and to that on localism, there is a strand of opinion which affirms the importance of national issues in elections. R. W. Davis has said of the counties, for example, that “the importance of landed influence has been vastly over-rated” and that “county politics rested on more than the decisions of cosy little caucuses of country gentlemen” (Davis 1972: 37, 98). In Davis’s view, the leaders of county politics gave a lead to opinion but did not dictate the outcome. Accordingly, MPs could not disregard the opinion of the middling class of electors in their constituencies with impunity, as might be supposed on a view of politics emphasizing influence.

Related to the controversy over the role of national issues in parliamentary elections is the question of whether the opinions of constituents

¹Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, clxxxii, 156.

The influence of constituents

affected the votes of MPs in the Commons. If elections could be won or lost by taking the wrong stand on issues, then one ought to see a systematic relationship between the voting behavior of MPs and the kinds of constituencies they sat for. If elections were controlled by local elites, one ought presumably to find MPs supporting the opinion of these elites, if not of the broader constituency. Only if elections were thoroughly “local” should there be no systematic relation between the votes of MPs and of their constituents.

Surprisingly, there have been only a few quantitative efforts to assess the influence of constituents over their MPs, the best known and most extensive of which is W. O. Aydelotte’s study (1977) of the 1841–47 Parliament.² Aydelotte measured the correlation between the interests of constituencies and the voting positions taken by the MPs representing them. Local interests were determined by a rough demographic classification intended to catch the degree of urbanization. In England, for example, counties and small boroughs were presumed to have been predominantly rural, medium-sized boroughs less so, and large boroughs predominantly urban. Aydelotte found that the more rural constituencies generally were represented by MPs whose voting records (as summarized on a five-point scale) were conservative, and that this held both between and within the two major parties.

Aydelotte’s demonstration of a correlation between the interests of constituencies and the political positions of their MPs is consistent with the supposition that Victorian elections did serve to ensure agreement on policy between representatives and represented. But Aydelotte also found that MPs who faced contests in 1841 appeared no more likely to “vote their constituencies” than those returned unopposed, and that all shades of political opinion enjoyed about the same reelection success in the various categories of constituency. He concluded that however the correlation between local interests and the policy positions of MPs arose, it was not obviously via the electoral process.

This conclusion has been questioned on the grounds that Aydelotte’s methods of analysis did not allow him to capture the importance of certain key issues which attracted the bulk of electoral attention (Davis 1976). One might argue further that even if Aydelotte had been able to refine his analysis and focus on salient issues, the particular tests he offered to ascertain whether or not specifically electoral pressure was being exerted were defective. His results can and should be interpreted as evidence of the importance of local electoral pressures.

It is best first to define what is meant by “electoral pressure,” since this term refers to more than overt electoral threats. As used here, electoral

²See also Bylsma (1968) and Stephens and Brady (1976).

The electorate

pressure on the voting decisions of MPs existed when three conditions were met: (1) MPs valued reelection; (2) constituents based their votes to some extent on the previous and anticipated voting behavior of the candidates; and (3) MPs were aware that their constituents voted in this way. When these three conditions were met for a given issue, an MP faced electoral pressure: that is, he recognized that his vote in a division might affect his chances for reelection (which he by assumption valued). Electoral pressure might thus have influenced his decision. It is important to note that MPs need not have been subjected to overt forms of electoral brow-beating in order to feel pressure. An MP from a homogeneous constituency, even without any communication whatsoever from his district, undoubtedly knew what its central interests were and recognized without anyone pointing it out to him that if he voted against those interests he risked electoral defeat. Similarly, even on less salient issues, the MP might well have recognized without being specifically notified that certain groups in his constituency had preferences on an issue which would affect their voting decisions.³

If the three conditions listed above were met with sufficient frequency and force, a significant correlation between local interests and the votes of local representatives can be expected. It is important to note, though, that this correlation will not come about simply because local pressures continually *overbore* the conscience of the MP (or other, competing pressures put upon him). Rather, to a large degree, the correlation will arise because (1) candidates chose to contest constituencies in which they thought they had a chance; (2) this entailed *anticipation* of the kinds of policy demands the constituency was likely to make; and hence (3) successful candidates agreed with their constituents' consensual preferences fairly often. In other words, electoral pressure did not just operate at the time of an important division, with watchful constituents making clear the dire consequences of an incorrect vote. It also affected the decisions of candidates whether to contest a given constituency in the first place. Furthermore, electoral pressure should have operated in this way regardless of whether an actual contest occurred. It was the possibility of a contest that counted. Thus, candidates like Charles Bradlaugh did not even approach Oxford University, because they had not a skeptic's chance in paradise of succeeding. Aydelotte's finding that MPs who faced contests were no more likely to toe the constituency line than those who did not is largely irrelevant to the question of how potent local pressures were.⁴

³This discussion of constituency influence is influenced by Fiorina (1974).

⁴Aydelotte's view of those not facing contests is (implicitly) that they were individually powerful and hence could vote as they pleased, whether or not their votes supported local interests. This may have been true of some, perhaps those who bought their seats. But others did not face a contest precisely because they were good poli-

The influence of constituents

Given this conception of electoral pressure, Aydelotte's work can be interpreted as follows. He identified (albeit crudely) the interests of constituencies along a rural/urban dimension and found a consistent correlation with the behavior of MPs. This correlation arises partly because candidates selected constituencies in which they could win (with or without a contest), while constituencies selected candidates (with or without a contest) in part on the basis on their policy stands. The correlation also arises because, once in office, the MP was reinforced in his own opinions when his constituents happened to agree, and may have deferred to his constituents' opinions on matters over which they disagreed.

Aydelotte's statistical analysis complements the more detailed narrative analyses of Davis, Olney, and other historians who emphasize that national issues did play a major role in elections and that, accordingly, how MPs voted could affect their electoral fortunes. The quantitative work of Bylsma (1968) on the 1852–57 Parliament, and to a lesser extent that of Stephens and Brady (1976) on the 1880–85 Parliament, also comports with such a view. In this chapter, we provide alternative statistics which show the importance of the policy nexus between MPs and their constituents. Moreover, we argue that the role of policy in elections and the influence of constituents over their MPs underwent a fundamental change by the 1870s.

THE POLICY-ORIENTED SPLIT VOTER

Preliminary to seeking direct evidence of effective local influence it is natural to examine the conditions postulated to underlie such influence. As defined above, electoral pressure first of all depended on the MP valuing reelection. This condition seems quite reasonable given the evidence in Chapter 7; when over 75% of incumbent MPs did in fact seek reelection – even when faced with a contest – it is safe to infer that most of them valued reelection.

What of the second condition? Did Victorian electors base their votes to some extent on the specific policy stands taken by the candidates? Certainly this is an important theme in much of recent political history, including the work of Olney (1973), Fraser (1976), Davis (1972), Stewart (1978), Hamer (1977), and Nossiter (1975). And, as argued in Chapter 10, the short-term fluctuations in extra-parliamentary party organization, party discipline, and split voting are explicable largely in terms of the

ticians and had satisfied their constituents. Indeed, one might well imagine Aydelotte's procedure being applied to the United States with similar results. At every election, certain Congressmen are returned (virtually) unopposed, but it is highly unlikely that they are less in tune with their constituents than those who face a contest. If anything, the opposite expectation would seem more tenable.

The electorate

ebb and flow of opinion. In this section, we offer a further bit of evidence by demonstrating that cross-sectional variation in split voting can be explained in terms of political issues and the way in which MPs handled those issues.

Specifically, we look at the percentage of an incumbent candidate's total votes which came in the form of split votes, and relate this to his previous voting behavior in Parliament. To take the example of Aylesbury in 1857, one finds that R. Bethell, one of two Liberal incumbents, received a total of 501 votes, of which 130 or 26% came in the form of splits with the lone Conservative, T. T. Bernard. In contrast, A. H. Layard, the other Liberal, received only 9% of his support from splits with Bernard. This difference in split vote support seems to have stemmed from a difference in policy between the two Liberals. Layard had been a consistent supporter of Radical measures in the previous Parliament, voting for the secret ballot and parliamentary, military, and administrative reform. He had also voted against Palmerston's government on the coercion of China after the *Arrow* incident, the question on which Parliament was dissolved. Bethell, in contrast, had been Attorney General in the late government and was "extremely critical of those who had turned it out" (Davis 1972: 159–69). Interestingly, although Bethell had been a member of the Palmerston government (which did not form until 1855), he had dissented in order to support the Conservative position more often than had Layard over the full course of the Parliament. In a sample of 145 divisions from the 1852–57 Parliament, collected by Bylsma (1968), 11.7% of Bethell's votes were "crossbench dissents" – that is, votes which were in agreement with the position adopted by a majority of Conservatives and in opposition to the position adopted by a majority of Liberals. In contrast, only 6.6% of Layard's votes were crossbench dissents. It is plausible that Conservative voters – those who most preferred Bernard – were tempted to use their second votes in order to aid the preferred Liberal; on the hypothesis that this preference between Liberals was determined by their willingness on occasion to support Conservative principles, one would expect Bethell to get the lion's share of split votes. This is indeed what happened. Thus, in this case, the split vote support that incumbent candidates received is intelligible in terms of their previous voting behavior, as captured in the rate of crossbench dissent. The question is whether there was a consistent relationship of this kind, or whether Aylesbury in 1857 was exceptional.

In order to answer this question, the general elections of 1847, 1857, and 1880 have been examined. These elections were chosen because each comes after a Parliament which has been studied by Aydelotte or his students, and data are thus available on the voting behavior of MPs. Aydelotte has coded 186 divisions for the 1841–47 Parliament, Bylsma

The influence of constituents

145 for the 1852–57 Parliament, and Hamilton 50 for the 1874–80 Parliament. All used roughly the same criteria in selecting the divisions to be coded, seeking important votes which were well attended. With such data, one can compute a variety of party support and dissidence scores including, what will be relevant here, the rates of crossbench dissent (CB).

The plan of action is simply to see whether those MPs with high rates of crossbench dissent in each of the three Parliaments tended to receive a high proportion of their support at the next election in the form of split votes. Since it would make little sense, given what is already known from Chapter 10, to compare MPs who ran in four-candidate contests to those who ran in three candidate contests, the analysis is confined to MPs who sought reelection in two-against-one races. Further, since MPs who ran as the only candidate of their party were almost guaranteed to receive more split votes than did MPs who ran with a colleague, the former must be separated from the latter. The actual procedure has been to identify, in each year, two subsets of MPs: first, Liberal MPs seeking reelection in a contest with one other Liberal and one Conservative; second, Conservative MPs seeking reelection in a contest with one other Conservative and one Liberal. For each subset separately, the correlation between an MP's rate of crossbench dissent and the percentage of his total vote coming in the form of split votes (S) can be computed.

Before doing either of these things, it is best first to note some very real shortcomings of the proposed analysis – shortcomings which tend to reduce the chances of finding significant correlations. First, simple rates of crossbench dissent are extremely crude indices of the relevant political behavior. Ideally, one would measure the behavior of each MP only on those issues salient to his constituents. As it is, no effort has been made to separate the wheat from the chaff. In 1841–47, for example, all 186 divisions coded by Aydelotte have been used, regardless of potential importance. The possibility clearly exists that dissents cast on some votes were largely irrelevant and hence simply add noise to the analysis.

A second and more important shortcoming of the analysis, which would remain even if electorally important issues were singled out, is that it does not control for the characteristics of the other candidates. In Aylesbury, there was a contrast in the voting behavior of Bethell and Layard, and Bethell's relatively high level of crossbench dissent was matched with a fairly high level of split vote support. But what if Layard's politics had been identical with Bethell's? Then, supposing voters to have been issue-oriented, Bethell and Layard both would likely have received fewer split votes, since there would have been little to choose between them politically. The problem with simply correlating CB and S is that S depends not just on the political behavior of the MP under scrutiny –

The electorate

as captured in CB – but also on the political behavior of both other candidates, and on how large the contrasts were between candidates. To take the example of two Liberals running against a single Conservative, split voting should have been high not just when one of the Liberals cast many crossbench dissents, but when one of them did so and the other did not, or, more fundamentally, when there was a political contrast between them (whether that contrast could be accurately measured by the difference in their crossbench dissension or not). Thus, the bivariate correlation between CB and S may be rather weak, because the characteristics of other candidates are not controlled for. The only hope of (partially) overcoming this problem is to concentrate on those constituencies where two incumbents sought reelection. Unfortunately, the number of such constituencies for which vote counts exist is too small to be of much use, and one would still be unable to control for the characteristics of the challenger, except in those even rarer instances where the challenger also had sat in the previous Parliament.

With the foregoing caveats in mind, we can turn to the results. The bivariate correlation between S and CB is always of the expected (positive) sign: the more crossbench dissents an MP had cast in Parliament, the more splits he tended to receive at the next election. The relationship is weak for the Conservatives, however, with correlations of .25, .45, and .002 in 1847, 1857, and 1880, respectively. For Liberal MPs the correlation is .17 in 1847, .53 in 1857, and .50 in 1880, the latter two being significant at the .01 level. If bivariate regression is used to calculate the behavioral relationship between CB and S, the results are as in Table 12.1, where panel I refers to the Liberal subset of MPs and panel II to the Conservative subset. The results for the Liberals in 1857 can be interpreted as follows (with other regressions interpreted similarly): A Liberal MP who had never cast a crossbench dissent received on average 11.84% of his total votes in the form of split votes. For every 1 percentage point increase in the rate of crossbench dissent, Liberal MPs tended to receive .78 percentage point more in split support. Thus, a member who, like Bethell, had dissented crossbench 11.7% of the time was expected to receive 20.97% of his support from split votes (Bethell actually received 25.95%). The explanatory power of the model, which was estimated on the basis of data for 33 Liberal MPs seeking reelection in 1857, can be judged from the R^2 statistic reported in the fourth row. This statistic is simply the square of the correlation coefficient and can be interpreted as saying that 28% of the total variance in the dependent variable (S) is explained by the regression. More elaborate specifications of the regression model, which include other variables deemed to bear some relationship to split voting, do not much affect the size or

The influence of constituents

Table 12.1. *Split voting as a function of crossbench dissent*

Independent variables	1847 estimated coefficients (<i>t</i>)	1857 estimated coefficients (<i>t</i>)	1880 estimated coefficients (<i>t</i>)
<i>Panel I: Liberals</i>			
Constant	23.34 (2.6)	11.84 (2.5)	4.01 (2.7)
CB	.58 (.8)	.78 (3.5)	.36 (2.7)
R ²	.03	.28	.25
Observations	22	33	24
<i>Panel II: Conservatives</i>			
Constant	14.45 (2.6)	3.04 (.6)	5.49 (5.8)
CB	.52 (1.0)	.64 (1.0)	.002 (.01)
R ²	.06	.20	.00
Observations	20	6	23

Note: The unit of observation is an incumbent MP seeking reelection. The dependent variable is the percentage of the MP's total votes coming in the form of split votes. The independent variable CB equals the percentage of times the MP had voted against a majority of his own party and with a majority of the opposite party in the previous Parliament. The divisions used to calculate CB were as follows: (1) in 1841–47, 186 divisions coded by W. O. Aydelotte and available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; (2) in 1852–57, 145 divisions coded by Bylsma (1968); (3) in 1874–80, 50 divisions coded by Hamilton (1968), plus a random sample of 26 divisions drawn from the same Parliament by the author. We have for this analysis merged the two sources, yielding a sample of 74 divisions (there were two duplicates).

significance of the coefficient of CB (although they do improve the statistical fit).⁵

The political meaning of the regressions for the Liberals can be explained in terms of the clash between Whigs and Radicals, on the one

⁵Several alternative specifications of the regression have been examined. For example, the variables CTYPE, LOSER, and W have been included as regressors, where CTYPE = 1 if the MP sat for a borough, and CTYPE = 0 if he sat for a county; LOSER = 1 if the MP lost his reelection bid, and LOSER = 0 if he won; W = 1 if the MP won his reelection bid but his "running mate" lost, and W = 0 otherwise. The intent is to allow the intercept of the regression to adjust in plausible ways. Thus, we already know that split voting was higher in boroughs, so the coefficient of CTYPE is expected to be positive. If the MP lost, or if he won but his colleague lost, then his constituents made a split-party return to Parliament. We know from previous analysis that there was usually a lot of split voting when the return was split. Moreover, it is mathematically required in a split return that the loser receive fewer split votes than his winning colleague. Hence, the coefficient of LOSER should be negative, and the coefficient of W should be positive. As it turned out, these expectations are generally borne out. The new coefficients were almost always of the expected sign and sometimes significant. The R² values of the respecified equations were uniformly higher, with the sole exception of the 1880 equation for the Conservatives. More important for our

The electorate

hand, and the nature of dissidence in the Liberal party, on the other. The Liberals were a fractious and divided party, extending from Reformers, Radicals, and Radical Reformers, on the left, to Whigs and Palmerstonians, on the right. The conflict between Whigs and Radicals often flared up in the constituencies, and deals with the enemy were cut by one side or the other (Nossiter 1975). A “Candid Conservative,” writing in 1884 of the Redistribution Act of that year, which abolished most of the double-member constituencies, anticipated vigorous resistance from the Whigs, “whose political importance has for years been mainly due to that system of two-membered constituencies which has enabled a small faction, holding in most country towns the balance between Conservatives and Radicals, to make terms with either party, and so secure for itself a moiety of the representation” (Hanham 1978: 74). The size of the electorate in many of the country towns was not so different from that of a large legislature, and the politics of dividing two seats seems to have been in some respects similar to the distribution of portfolios in European legislatures. Even if no explicit cross-party coalition was forged, split voting was likely to be high when a Whig and a Radical ran together, since Conservative voters might use their second votes to choose between Liberals – and there was a choice. Generally, the Whig was the greater beneficiary of Conservative splits. Since Whigs also tended to cast more crossbench dissents, a positive correlation between CB and S for the Liberal party resulted.⁶

The same line of reasoning suggests why the results for the Conservatives (in panel II) are so weak. The Conservatives contested most elections in the century as a fairly compact and cohesive unit. Crossbench dissent did to some extent distinguish Peelites from Protectionists, but the Peelite

purposes than the overall goodness of fit was that the coefficient of CB remained relatively unaffected by the respecification. There was no strong *a priori* reason to believe that it would be affected – since none of the newly included dummy variables obviously covaried with crossbench dissent – but the stability of the coefficient is nonetheless gratifying. Technically, of course, it can hardly be claimed that the re-specification was complete – that it was the true model – and hence the possibility remains that the coefficient of CB might be reduced in significance or even reversed in sign by further multivariate analysis. This would occur, however, only if some of the variables presently excluded from analysis – e.g., variables tapping the characteristics of other candidates in the contest – were correlated with CB. At present we can think of no excluded variable which plausibly covaries with CB in such a fashion as to reverse its sign. Hence, we are satisfied that the bivariate analysis in the text does not mislead as far as the sign of CB’s coefficient is concerned.

⁶In the 1841–47 Parliament, Whigs cast on average 10.3% of their votes crossbench, as opposed to 8.9% for Reformers; in 1852–57 the figures were 16.4% and 13.6%, respectively. The characteristic form of dissent for Reformers was to oppose both a majority of the Liberal party and a majority of the Conservative party: in 1841–47, Reformers dissented in this fashion 8.7% of the time, Whigs 5.9% of the time. In 1852–57, the story is similar: 5.4% and 2.4%, respectively.

The influence of constituents

section was quite small by 1857 and of course nonexistent by 1880, and even in 1847 the distinction is crude. As a consequence, the coefficient of crossbench dissent is never significant.

This is not to say that no policy differences were ever perceived between Conservatives. A consideration of the Corn Laws is sufficient to dispel this notion. Aydelotte has constructed a scale measuring support for agricultural protection in the 1841–47 Parliament which can be considered an alternative and somewhat finer tool for distinguishing between Peelites and Protectionists. The higher a Conservative MP placed on this scale (i.e., the more protectionist he was), the fewer split votes he tended to receive in 1847 – the correlation being $-.65$ (significant at the .01 level).

THE INFLUENCE OF CONSTITUENTS – PART I

If MPs wished to be reelected and votes were cast on the basis of policy differences, as the last section has argued, then the conditions for local electoral pressure were met. In the remainder of this chapter, two approaches to demonstrating the importance of local electoral pressures, both in their own right and as a cause of dissidence, are taken. The first approach simply reverses the temporal sequence of the analysis in the last section, predicting the crossbench dissidence of MPs on the basis of the number of split votes they had received at their last election. The second approach looks at the average percentage of times MPs from the same constituency agreed, when both voted, and contrasts this with the average percentage of times MPs from different constituencies agreed, when both voted.

The basic intuition behind the first of these approaches can be explained by considering an election between two Liberals and a Conservative at which both Liberals were returned. Presumably one of the Liberals – Mr. X, let us say – benefitted to a greater degree than the other from the support of Conservative partisans who, rather than plumping for their party's candidate, split their votes instead. If these voters split their votes because they perceived a similarity in the issue stands taken by Mr. X and the Conservative party, then Mr. X might have felt electoral pressure on certain issues once in Parliament. Of course, it may have been in anticipation of receiving some Conservative splits that Mr. X entered the contest to begin with. In any event, if the policy cleavages dividing Liberals and Conservatives in Parliament were congruent with those in the constituencies, one ought to find Liberal beneficiaries of split votes voting with the Conservative party more often than Liberals receiving few split votes. That is, split votes in the constituencies should have induced cross-bench dissidence in Parliament. Did they?

The electorate

Table 12.2. Crossbench dissent as a function of split voting

Independent variables	1841 estimated coefficient (t)	1852 estimated coefficient (t)	1874 estimated coefficient (t)	1880 estimated coefficient (t)
<i>Panel I: Liberals</i>				
Constant	19.08 (.573)	12.32 (.85)	14.35 (3.54)	8.05 (3.24)
S	.51 (2.89)	.39 (3.07)	-.06 (.16)	.72 (3.76)
CTYPE	-13.05 (4.14)	-4.09 (.28)	-9.13 (2.36)	-8.79 (3.29)
R ²	.50	.20	.24	.41
Observations	34	41	21	36
<i>Panel II: Conservatives</i>				
Constant	7.54 (3.84)	3.55 (.43)	2.76 (1.28)	-.12 (.12)
S	.04 (.76)	.16 (.59)	.27 (.98)	.37 (2.44)
CTYPE	-1.00 (.47)	14.60 (1.75)	-3.35 (.93)	-1.51 (.95)
R ²	.01	.13	.06	.20
Observations	50	26	24	32

Note: The unit of observation is an MP who won election in a contest involving another candidate of the same party and one of the opposite party. The dependent variable is the rate of crossbench dissent in the ensuing Parliament. The independent variables are the percentage of the MP's total votes coming in the form of splits (S) and the type of constituency for which the MP sat (CTYPE = 0 if a county, 1 if a borough). Divisions for each Parliament are as described in Table 12.1 for 1841–47, 1852–57, and 1874–80. For 1880–85, 36 divisions coded by Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback were used. The selection principles used by Davis and Huttenback were roughly comparable to those used by Aydelotte, Bylsma, and Hamilton.

One indication that they did is that the bivariate correlation between splits and crossbench dissents is always of the expected (positive) sign. MPs from four general elections – 1841, 1852, 1874, and 1880 – were examined; those who received a high percentage of their total support from splits tended to cast more crossbench dissents in the ensuing Parliament. As in the previous analysis, the relationship is weak for the Conservatives – with correlations (in chronological order) of .10, .14, .14, and .41, only the last being significant. The correlations for the Liberals are (in the same order) .48, .45, .02, and .46, all but one significant.

In Table 12.2, multiple regressions which corroborate the bivariate analysis are estimated for the same four years. The 1841 regression for Liberals can be taken as an example. In that year, our sample of vote counts included data on 34 Liberal candidates who (1) ran in a contest pitting two Liberals against a single Conservative and (2) were elected to Parliament. For each of these MPs, the percentage of his total votes coming in the form of splits (S) and the type of constituency he sat for

The influence of constituents

(CTYPE) were coded as independent variables, with the rate of cross-bench dissent in the 1841–47 Parliament (CB) as the dependent variable. The type of constituency was included since Aydelotte's work suggests that Liberals from the counties were more likely to dissent than Liberals from the boroughs, with just the reverse true for Conservatives. Both independent variables, in other words, can be viewed as tapping the influence of constituents.

The results in 1841 show that, as expected, Liberal MPs from boroughs cast fewer crossbench dissents than did their colleagues from counties: on average their crossbench dissent rate was 13.05 percentage points lower, this difference being significant. Also as expected, there was a tendency for Liberal MPs – from either boroughs or counties – to cast more crossbench dissents if they had received more split vote support: the coefficient of .51 means that, for every 1 percentage point increase in split vote support, the crossbench dissent rate increased on average by .51 percentage point.⁷

The Conservatives in 1841 are another matter. The regression analysis fails almost completely to explain the variation in Conservative dissidence. Although the coefficient of S is at least of the right sign, it is insignificant, and the coefficient of CTYPE is of the wrong sign. Indeed, borough Conservatives do not seem to have dissented more frequently in any Parliament except that of 1852–57. Probably this is because most Conservatives sat for small boroughs whose interests were largely rural, and our analysis does not, as Aydelotte's did, separate large and small boroughs.

The most straightforward interpretation of the results in Table 12.2, especially in conjunction with those in Table 12.1, is that a significant number of split votes were cast for political reasons and that MPs responded to this in a predictable fashion.⁸ The analysis does not shed much light on the controversy over the extent of influence, for the results are consistent with either much or little influence. But it does indicate

⁷Some alternative specifications of the regression have been tried. For example, a dummy variable equal to unity when the contest resulted in a split return has been included. No significant changes of the sign, size, or significance of the coefficient of S were produced.

⁸Nonetheless, from a purely econometric standpoint, the evidence here allows only the conclusion that *at least* one of these linkages was operating. The findings are consistent with a scenario under which voters responded to the behavior of MPs whose own behavior was consistent over time, but unresponsive to that of voters. The findings are also consistent with voters being unresponsive but consistent, and MPs responding to voters. Neither of these possibilities seems to make much sense, however. In the latter case, why are MPs responsive if voters are immutable? In the former case, if voters are responsive to policy differences, and MPs value reelection, why are they not responsive?

The electorate

that a purely local interpretation of parliamentary elections such as that advanced by Vincent is not tenable.⁹

Can we conclude anything more? Not on the basis of the analysis so far, standing alone. The scarcity of vote counts, together with the necessity of controlling for contest type and party, have reduced too far the number of observations on which the analysis rests. In the next section, further evidence that local electoral pressures were significant, based on a vastly larger data set, is adduced. Moreover, evidence that such pressures declined, as predicted in the previous chapter, is given.

THE INFLUENCE OF CONSTITUENTS — PART 2

The existence of double- and other multi-member constituencies opens the door to a different perspective on local influence: the percentage of times two MPs agreed when both voted (their agreement score) can be looked at as a function of whether they did or did not serve the same constituency. There are several reasons to believe that MPs from the same constituency ought to have gone into the same division lobby more often than MPs from different constituencies. Perhaps the most obvious is that MPs from the same constituency were more likely also to be of the same party; since MPs agreed more often with their partisan colleagues than with their partisan opponents, a greater agreement among MPs from the same districts is expected. In the analysis presented below, we do not allow for this indirect kind of local influence, since we control for party. That is, pairs of MPs of the same party are considered separately from those of different parties, and the question is asked whether being from the same constituency made any further contribution to agreement scores.¹⁰

Of course, contrasting pairs of MPs who did share constituency to pairs who did not is not analogous to, say, contrasting pairs who did and did not share party. In the latter comparison, there are two expectations which render the procedure meaningful: first, that members of

⁹Another indication of the relationship between cross voting in Parliament and the constituencies comes from scrutinizing pairs of MPs from the same party and constituency. If the MP receiving a higher percentage of his total support from cross votes is indexed by 1, and his colleague by 2, then we can designate the respective split vote shares and rates of crossbench dissidence by S_1 , S_2 , CB_1 , and CB_2 . If splits caused dissidence, then MPs who received considerably more split votes than their colleague should have cast considerably more crossbench dissents. There should be a positive correlation, in other words, between $DS = S_1 - S_2$ and $DCB = CB_1 - CB_2$. In fact this is the case. For the Conservatives, the correlations are .00, .50, .23, and .23; for the Liberals, .50, .59, .38, and .61.

¹⁰Analyses somewhat similar to that performed here have recently been done for the U.S. Senate. See Markus (1974), Bullock and Brady (1983), Poole and Rosenthal (1984), and Peltzman (1984).

The influence of constituents

the same party were generally all pushed in the same direction (to vote aye, or to vote no) by party pressures; and second, that members of opposite parties were generally pushed in opposite directions.

Neither of these assumptions holds as strongly when we are comparing members of the same constituency with members of different constituencies. That two MPs hailed from the same constituency did not necessarily mean that they experienced similar pressures on most divisions. If the MPs were of different party – and we shall confine attention to such pairs until further notice – one might well suppose that they catered to different groups within the constituency. If this was so, the overall effect of constituent pressures might have been to push the MPs apart.¹¹

Similarly, that two MPs were from different constituencies did not necessarily mean that they were consistently pushed in opposite directions. If the chosen pair of MPs happened to come from similar agricultural districts, for example, then on issues touching agricultural interests, both probably faced the same pressures from their constituents.

Why, then, should the rate of agreement between pairs from the same constituency have been greater than that between pairs from different constituencies (both pairs not sharing party)? It is not, as just seen, because we are comparing a set of situations in which constituent pressures always pushed the MPs in the same direction to one in which they always pushed them in contrary directions. Nonetheless, there is still a presumption that, on average, MPs who sat for the same district may more often have received the same message from their constituency than did MPs of different districts. If MPs served the local economic interests of their constituencies, then two MPs from the same district should have agreed on matters touching those interests, even if they were of different parties. If MPs supported the opinions of their constituents, then whenever there was a local consensus on a particular issue, both sitting MPs should have voted in the same way. Even when there was not a constituency-wide consensus, MPs of the same party may have faced a fairly solid body of opinion among their supporters – and responded to this.

In Table 12.3 an analysis of the agreement between pairs of English MPs from the same and different constituencies is conducted for the Parliaments of 1841–47, 1852–57, 1874–80, and 1880–85. The results are quite interesting and bear directly on the questions posed at the end of the last chapter: Did local electoral pressures cause dissidence? And did they decline with time?

Consider first the relationship between constituency influence and discipline. We saw in the last section that, at least for the Liberals, MPs

¹¹For a discussion of similar ideas in a more general theoretical context, see Fiorina (1974: 20–23).

The electorate

Table 12.3. Agreement of pairs of English MPs who did and did not share constituency

Constituency	1841–47 (N)	1852–57 (N)	1874–80 (N)	1880–85 (N)
<i>Panel I: MPs of different parties</i>				
Same constituency				
	38.1 (68)	43.5 (81)	23.0 (65)	36.0 (40)
Different constituencies	30.8 (175)	33.1 (301)	22.6 (304)	33.1 (235)
	7.3	10.4	.4	2.9
	$t = 2.93$	$t = 3.88$	$t = .23$	$t = .93$
<i>Panel II: MPs of same party</i>				
Same constituency				
	84.9 (200)	82.4 (182)	95.3 (110)	95.6 (96)
Different constituencies	80.0 (215)	76.5 (304)	91.9 (365)	91.0 (234)
	4.9	5.9	3.4	4.6
	$t = 3.33$	$t = 3.36$	$t = 3.37$	$t = 3.04$

Note: The total number of pairs of MPs is astronomical. The procedure here has been to include all pairs from the same constituency who had voted together sufficiently often to yield a meaningful agreement score, and a random sample of pairs from different constituencies (also subject to having voted together “often”). The operational definition of having voted together “often” was established before the analysis by choosing a random number between five and ten; this number turned out to be eight, and accordingly only pairs who had participated in the same division eight or more times were included. This procedure was departed from in 1880–85 because the number of pairs passing the participation test was unacceptably low; all pairs who had participated in the same division six or more times were included in the 1880–85 analysis.

receiving more split votes and MPs from constituencies atypical of the kind of constituency generally represented by their party both cast more crossbench dissents; we now see, based on a vastly larger and more reliable data set, that MPs from the same geographical constituency agreed more often than MPs from different constituencies, even when party is controlled for. This last finding is entirely consonant with the previous results. Consider, for example, the 1852–57 Parliament. MPs from different parties and constituencies agreed on average in 33.1% of the divisions in which both participated. MPs from different parties but the same constituency, on the other hand, agreed 43.5% of the time. Necessarily, when two MPs of different parties agreed, at least one of them had to be dissenting, and, typically, one of them was dissenting

The influence of constituents

crossbench. Thus, the 10.4% different-party “constituency effect” translated directly into dissidence.

While an equally straightforward argument cannot be fashioned for MPs from the same party, nonetheless the same-party constituency effect of 5.9% in 1852–57 does suggest the importance of local pressures, and hence a local basis to indiscipline. The specific interests and demands of constituents, in other words, did cause dissidence.

Moreover, the measured effect of local pressures on voting behavior declined with time. This is most obvious among MPs from different parties, where the constituency effect declined from 7.3% and 10.4% before 1867 to 0.4% and 2.9% after. But it also appears among MPs from the same party, where the average constituency effect was 5.4% before 1867 and 4.0% after.

There are several possible objections to accepting these figures as evidence of a decline in the impact of local pressures. First, the size of the statistic tapping the constituency effect obviously depends on the specific divisions used in the analysis. To take an extreme example, if the divisions used in a particular Parliament were all unanimous “hurrah votes,” then no constituency effect at all would be registered. Thus, in comparing two Parliaments, comparable sets of divisions should be used. Ideally, one would have the full complement of divisions from each Parliament, and have the luxury of selecting specific issues or sets of issues. Unfortunately, the machine-readable data archives on divisions for the House of Commons are scant indeed. Most of what has been done is due to W. O. Aydelotte and his students, and this is the primary source upon which we rely in the analysis in Table 12.3. This necessity has the important virtue that the divisions used in each of the various Parliaments were selected according to a roughly similar criterion, as noted in the first section. There is thus no *a priori* reason to believe that the analysis has been biased one way or another by the selection of divisions.

Of course, the divisions used in 1874–80 and 1880–85 did differ in one way from those used in the two earlier Parliaments: discipline was higher on average. The average Rice coefficients of cohesion for the divisions used in the various Parliaments were, in chronological order, .683, .610, .778, and .861. Moreover, there is a logical relationship between aggregate party cohesion and the statistics given in Table 12.3. In the extreme – perfect cohesion – no constituency effect would be visible when party was controlled, since no two members of the same party would ever disagree, and members of opposite parties would agree only on unanimous divisions. Since it is known that party cohesion was higher in 1874–80 and 1880–85, one might suspect that *any* examination of roll-call behavior which controls for party will find less to explain. To a certain extent this may be. But it should be noted that the levels of

The electorate

cohesion in 1874–80 and 1880–85 are perfectly compatible with constituency effects as large as those in 1852–57. No mathematical upper bound has been encountered. Indeed, although cohesion was considerably higher in 1880–85 than in 1874–80, the constituency effect was nonetheless larger.

Another possible objection to the analysis is that considerably fewer divisions were available for analysis in the later than in the earlier Parliaments. The number of divisions available declined monotonically with time: 186, 145, 74, 36. Perhaps the declining constituency effect is only an artifact. MPs who voted often are more likely to be included in the analysis (since an agreement score can be computed for them with many other MPs), but those who voted often were probably the most likely to vote with their parties; hence, the constituency effect may be a decreasing function of the number of divisions available for analysis. Whatever the merits of this objection on logical grounds, it does not appear to be important in practice. If the analysis in 1841–47 and 1852–57 is performed with fewer divisions, the constituency effect registered in those Parliaments does not generally decline. For example, in 1841–47 the figures were recomputed using only the first fifty of Aydelotte's divisions, and the constituency effect rose to 7.4 among MPs of different party, and to 7.1 among MPs of the same party. Moreover, regardless of the number of divisions used, the constituency effect does not clearly decline as a function of the participation cutoff used. In 1852–57, for example, if only pairs who had voted together 15 or more times are included, the different-party constituency effect falls to 9.7; if the cutoff is increased to 20 or more, the figure increases to 10.2. The measurement of the constituency effect is apparently not invalidated by the declining number of divisions available for investigation.

There is still the question, however, of how the analysis in the last section relates to the present investigation. Is not the continued tendency of MPs who received more split votes to cast more crossbench dissents in conflict with the assertion that constituent pressures were declining? Not really. What the correlation between splits and cross votes shows is that, when there *was* significant split voting, which is *prima facie* evidence that voters were *not* party-oriented, then crossbench dissidence was likely to be higher. The continuation of such a relationship is perfectly compatible with an overall decline in the amount of locally inspired dissent, since split voting itself declined. MPs probably remained as responsive as ever when their constituents placed specific demands upon them, but as time went by voters made fewer and fewer such individual and non-party demands, for the reasons indicated in Chapter 11.

More problematical is the continued tendency of Liberal MPs from county districts to cast more crossbench dissents than their urban col-

The influence of constituents

leagues – as indicated by the negative and significant coefficients of the variable CTYPE (panel I of Table 12.2). This pattern of dissent implies, or at least suggests, that different-party pairs from the same *county* agreed more often; yet, as seen in this section, different-party pairs from the same *constituency* did not agree more often in 1874. Of course, one might equally well infer from the generally negative coefficients of CTYPE for the Conservatives (panel II of Table 12.2), which indicate that borough Conservatives were not more likely to dissent, that different-party pairs from boroughs may have been little more likely to agree than pairs from different constituencies. Some color is lent this inference since the largest constituency effect is registered in the only Parliament in which the coefficient of CTYPE was positive and borough Conservatives did dissent more frequently. And this line of reasoning does seem to explain most of the discrepancy: different-party pairs from the same borough were in every Parliament much less likely to agree than different-party pairs from the same county. This presumably reflects the tradition in counties of arranging an amicable compromise division of the representation without a contest, in contrast to the more competitive tradition in the boroughs.

In drawing an overall conclusion from the analysis in this section, there is much to argue for modesty, especially as regards the trend over time in the impact of local pressures. Beyond the aforementioned question of whether the divisions used in each Parliament are comparable, there is the question of what other variables beyond the strength of local influence might affect the analysis (discussed in the Appendix). Yet, as of now, this is the only statistical evidence which directly addresses the strength of local pressures over time, and its most straightforward interpretation is that such pressures caused less dissidence in mid-Victorian than in early Victorian Parliaments.

I 3

The history of party voting

Over the course of the nineteenth century, virtually every major institution of the English polity was fundamentally altered: the electoral system by the expansion of the electorate, the adoption of secret voting, and the introduction of equally sized single-member districts; the House of Commons by a complete rewriting of the rules of public and private legislation; the House of Lords by the Parliament Act (1911); the Monarchy by a continuing atrophy of power; the Civil Service by the eradication of sinecures and patronage entailed in the transition to competitive examination; the press by the lessening and ultimate removal of the advertising, stamp, and paper duties, coupled with technological innovation. This study has focused on the development of two of the most important English political institutions: the Cabinet and the political parties. Our approach has not been to sift through the precedents and conventions of Cabinet government; this has been done extensively elsewhere (e.g., Jennings 1951; Mackintosh 1962). Rather, we have focused on two specific and quantifiable behaviors that reflected party development – viz., voting in Parliament and voting in the constituencies. The history of party government is told through the history of party voting.

In broad outline, the story runs as follows. England in the opening decades of the nineteenth century had in many respects an American-style system. MPs were individually powerful in Parliament, introducing and steering through the House legislation both private and public. They were also individually powerful in their constituencies, largely controlling electoral organization and finance, and acting as a conduit for patronage and private bills. The behavioral concomitants of this individual power were, first, a sizable personal vote in the constituencies and, second, a sizable independent vote in Parliament. Moreover, the two were directly connected: parliamentary indiscipline often stemmed from local pressures, which sometimes took the form of non-partisan votes.

Every feature of this picture had changed by the 1870s. The extension

Conclusion

of the suffrage prompted a decisive shift in the nature of electoral politics. Before the first Reform Act, only about a quarter of the constituencies were contested at the typical general election. The politics of avoiding or of winning a contest often involved reliance on influence, patronage, and bribery. After the first Reform Act, the frequency of contests more than doubled, and the politics of opinion – as symbolized by Peel's Tamworth Manifesto (1834), in which he outlined the policy a Conservative government would follow – began to play a larger role. The role that policy played was also larger because more of the constituencies were larger and incapable of being managed by the old techniques. By promising to provide general measures of public policy, politicians could appeal to broad sectors of the electorate and also to those political middlemen who sprang up in the early and mid-Victorian period – the pressure groups. More and more MPs thus stressed policy in their campaigns.

This in turn had important consequences for the functioning of Parliament. The new focus on policy together with the crush of business stimulated by an expanding economy led MPs to much greater participation in the affairs of Parliament and, somewhat ironically, to the centralization of legislative initiative in the Cabinet. As the Cabinet grew in importance, electors became more interested in the control of the Cabinet. Since the only means available to them to affect the executive was to vote for an MP affiliated with one of the major parties, voters became increasingly party-oriented, casting their votes not for individual candidates so much as for the parties to which they belonged. The party label became the most important contributor to an MP's vote total.

The system that thus developed of essentially electing the Prime Minister indirectly, through the House of Commons, ensured that the popularity of the party leadership had direct electoral consequences for all the party's members; the "coattails" of the Prime Minister, to borrow an American term, were institutionalized. The consequence of this was that as the Cabinet became more powerful, and as voters accordingly began using their votes to affect control of the Cabinet, electoral pressure was put directly on the decisions of the party leaders, who were thus not only "responsible" in the technical sense for the course of public affairs, but electorally accountable as well. By the same token, the electoral pressure on individual MPs from their constituents was lessened, and this was the key factor in reducing dissidence in Parliament. Only when electors ceased to turn their individual representatives out of office for failure to support local opinion, in favor of turning parties out, could high levels of discipline be sustained over any considerable length of time.

Appendix

This appendix examines in greater detail the logic of the agreement analysis presented in Table 12.3. We shall first introduce some notation.

Consider a randomly chosen pair j of MPs who are of different parties but may or may not be of different constituencies. Denote the set of all divisions at which both MPs in this pair voted by N_j . Presumably, at some of these divisions, both MPs were pushed in the same direction by constituent pressures. Call this subset of divisions U_j (the choice of U serving to indicate that constituent pressures in this case “unify” the pair of MPs). At all other divisions in N_j , then, either the MPs were pushed in opposite directions or one or both were not pressured at all. We designate the set of all divisions in N_j but not in U_j by \bar{U}_j .

In principle, one can think of the agreement of the j th pair based only on divisions in U_j – call this x_{ju} – and of the corresponding figure based only on divisions in \bar{U}_j – call this $x_{\bar{u}}$. The comparison we would like to make is between these two figures, between x_{ju} (how frequently the MPs agreed when constituent pressures were “unifying”: pushing both in the same direction) and $x_{\bar{u}}$ (how frequently they agreed when constituent pressures divided them). In the extreme, if local pressures always determined the votes of both MPs, then $x_{ju} = 1$ (when pressures are unifying, continual agreement) and $x_{\bar{u}} = 0$ (when pressures are dividing, continual disagreement). Unfortunately, the figures x_{ju} and $x_{\bar{u}}$ are not calculable since there is no way of identifying the sets U_j and \bar{U}_j . There is, however, a simple relationship between the observable agreement score x_j and the unobservable values x_{ju} and $x_{\bar{u}}$, viz.,

$$x_j = f_j x_{ju} + \bar{f}_j x_{\bar{u}} \quad (1)$$

where $f_j = |U_j|/|N_j|$ is the proportion of roll calls in U_j , and $\bar{f}_j = 1 - f_j$ is the proportion in \bar{U}_j . With some assumptions, it can be seen that the process of taking the difference of averages (as performed in Table 12.3) recovers an underestimate of the average value of $x_{ju} - x_{\bar{u}}$.

Appendix

To show this, we need first to examine what happens when we take an average of the values x_j within either the set J_0 of pairs not sharing constituency or the set J_1 of pairs sharing constituency. Consider first the average agreement score x° for pairs in J_0 . This average is related to the unobservable averages f° , x_u° , \bar{f}° , and $x_{\bar{u}}^\circ$ as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} x^\circ &= \frac{I}{|J_0|} \sum_{j \in J_0} (f_j x_{ju} + \bar{f}_j x_{j\bar{u}}) \\ &= f^\circ x_u^\circ + \bar{f}^\circ x_{\bar{u}}^\circ + \text{cov}(f_j, x_{ju}) + \text{cov}(\bar{f}_j, x_{j\bar{u}}) \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where

$$f^\circ = \frac{I}{|J_0|} \sum_{j \in J_0} f_j$$

is the average proportion of divisions at which local pressures were unifying for pairs in J_0 ;

$$x_u^\circ = \frac{I}{|J_0|} \sum_{j \in J_0} x_{ju}$$

is the average agreement score for pairs in J_0 when constituent pressures were unifying; f° and $x_{\bar{u}}^\circ$ are similarly defined;

$$\text{cov}(f_j, x_{ju}) = \frac{I}{|J_0|} \sum_{j \in J_0} (f_j - f^\circ)(x_{ju} - x_u^\circ)$$

and

$$\text{cov}(\bar{f}_j, x_{j\bar{u}}) = \frac{I}{|J_0|} \sum_{j \in J_0} (\bar{f}_j - \bar{f}^\circ)(x_{j\bar{u}} - x_{\bar{u}}^\circ)$$

are the covariances between the f and x terms; and the result follows with a little algebra or simply by recalling the rule that the expectation of the product of two random variables is equal to the product of their expectations plus their covariance. Our first basic assumption deals with the covariance terms:

$$\text{Assumption 1: } \text{cov}(f_j, x_{ju}) = 0 \text{ and } \text{cov}(\bar{f}_j, x_{j\bar{u}}) = 0.$$

What this assumption says is that there is no relationship between how frequently both MPs in a pair (sharing neither party nor constituency) were pushed in the same direction by local pressures and the frequency with which they agreed on these divisions. The idea is that once we have isolated a pair j and a division in U_j , there is no reason to suppose that the probability of the pair agreeing on that division depends on how many divisions there are in U_j (relative to N_j). We cannot, of course, offer any direct empirical evidence for this, since it deals with unobserv-

Appendix

able quantities; it is a basic assumption of the analysis. We shall understand a similar assumption concerning the covariances which appear when we look at the relationship of the observable average x^i for pairs in J_1 and the unobservable averages f^i , x_u^i , \bar{f}^i , and $x_{\bar{u}}^i$. Hence, we may write

$$x^i = f^i x_u^i + \bar{f}^i x_{\bar{u}}^i \quad (3)$$

considering the covariance terms to be negligible. What equation (3) says is that the overall average rate of agreement between pairs who share constituency (which we can calculate) is just a weighted average of the average rate of agreement when constituent pressures are unifying (x_u^i) and the average rate when constituent pressures are dividing ($x_{\bar{u}}^i$) – where the weights themselves are averages.

We turn now to the relationship between the unobservable term x_u^i and the corresponding term $x_{\bar{u}}^i$ in equation (2). Both these figures measure the following probability: that a randomly selected pair, in which both MPs are pressured to cast the same vote by their constituents, will agree. The only difference is that in one case, both MPs face the same geographical constituency, in the other, they face different constituencies. But this, we would argue, is irrelevant to the probability that they agree. The essential property of “sharing constituency” which prompted a belief in the first place that pairs from the same constituency would disagree less frequently than pairs from different constituencies was simply that of being “pushed in the same direction by constituent pressures.” But we have explicitly controlled for that characteristic in this comparison, and sharing or not sharing the same geographical constituency is no longer of consequence.

A similar argument can be made to motivate an assumption that $x_u^i = x_{\bar{u}}^i$. The chief reason to expect x^i to exceed x^o is, then, as we noted above, that local pressures are more often unifying for pairs of MPs from the same constituency, or, in terms of the equations, that $f^i > f^o$. If we use the assumptions that $x_u^o = x_u^i$ (= x_u , say) and $x_{\bar{u}}^o = x_{\bar{u}}^i$ (= $x_{\bar{u}}$, say), then an interesting thing happens when we take the difference of the overall observable averages x^o and x^i ; we get, after simplifying:

$$K_o = x^i - x^o = (f^i - f^o)(x_u - x_{\bar{u}}). \quad (4)$$

Thus, the difference in averages K_o is a discounted version of the “ideal measure” $x_u - x_{\bar{u}}$. Obviously, the assumptions needed in order to cast things in this form are strong and will not be met precisely, but if they are met approximately, the stated relationship will not be much perturbed.

Equation (4) provides an interpretable perspective on how and why the difference K_o understates what we should like to measure in any given

Appendix

year. Only if $f^i = 1$ (pairs from the same constituency always face unifying pressures) and $f^o = 0$ (pairs from different constituencies always face disunifying pressures) will K_o accurately reflect the full effect of local influence.

Equation (4) also shows that any trend in the values of K_o across Parliaments may be accepted as an indicator of trends in $x_u - x_{\bar{u}}$, under appropriate conditions: when the term $f^i - f^o$ is held constant, K_o increases (decreases) if and only if $x_u - x_{\bar{u}}$ increases (decreases). It is from this perspective that we wish to interpret the yearly values of K_o presented in panel I of Table 12.3.

It remains to justify, as best we can, the assumption that $f^i - f^o$ was roughly constant. What is the substantive meaning of this term? The term f^i can be thought of as a measure of the average homogeneity of those multi-member districts which returned members of different parties to Parliament. If such districts were often consensual, so that the MPs from them usually faced similar pressures, then f^i should be "large" – close to one. If, on the other hand, the multi-member districts whose representation in Parliament was split between the parties tended to be internally divided, f^i might be quite "small" – close to zero. The term f^o is more difficult to interpret, but it can be construed as a measure of the similarity of districts which returned Conservative MPs and districts which returned Liberal MPs. Pairs of MPs not sharing constituencies come from all kinds of districts – single- and multi-member, county and borough. A good many of these pairs are from "opposed" districts; e.g., a pair may comprise a Conservative from a county returning only Conservatives and a Liberal from a borough returning only Liberals. To the extent that these "opposed" pairs make up the bulk of the set of pairs from different constituencies, f^o is a measure of the political similarity of the constituency bases of the two parties. If the kinds of districts which returned only Liberals were different from the kinds represented only by Conservatives, then we would expect f^o to be smaller; if the constituency bases of the two parties were similar, we would expect f^o to be larger.

Thus, two overall features of the electoral system that will affect the yearly values of K_o , in addition to the strength of constituency influence, as captured by $x_u - x_{\bar{u}}$ are the degree of homogeneity of the multi-member districts that were represented by members of opposite parties, as measured by f^i , and the similarity of the constituent bases of the parties, as measured by f^o . Were there any trends in these latter variables?

The polarization of parties would seem to be relevant. If polarization occurred within most constituencies, then, in particular, it might have occurred within those districts returning members of opposite parties, ensuring that these members (presumed more sensitive to their own than to opposite partisans) would less often be prodded by similar messages

Appendix

from the constituency. This would drive f^* , and hence K_o , down. This argument must be hedged in two ways, however. First, those districts returning members of opposite parties cannot have been too polarized, else they would not have returned the members they did. Indeed it would seem that these districts must generally have been those most insulated from any process of polarization. Hence the decline in f^* should be limited. Second, to the extent that there was polarization, the sets of constituencies entirely in one camp or the other must have polarized. We can make the same assumption as above, that members pay more attention to their own than to opposite partisans, and make the case stronger; and it should be noted that this argument does not have the same problem as that above since we are comparing MPs from different constituencies – thus we may pick up the extremes of polarization. These considerations would indicate a decrease in f^* , hence an increase in K_o . It is not clear what trend in K_o to expect on the assumption of polarization. On the whole, therefore, we think that the decline in K_o can be accepted as evidence that constituent pressures declined.

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Author index

- Alderman, Geoffrey, 17
Alt, J. E., 76
Andrews, W. G., 84
Aydelotte, W. O., 22n, 58, 93, 125, 149–
53, 155, 157–9, 163
- Bagehot, Walter, 5, 51, 52n, 63n, 81, 84,
144
Beales, D., 22n, 26, 82
Bean, W. W., 97, 107n
Beattie, A., 50n, 94
Beckett, J. V., 134
Bedarida, François, 11
Beer, Samuel H., 22n, 23, 134
Berrington, Hugh, 22, 30, 44, 144
Bryce, James, 39–40, 143–4
Bullock, C. S., and D. Brady, 16on
Bulmer-Thomas, I., 57n
Butler, D., and J. Freeman, 77
Butler, D. E., 91
Butler, D. E., and D. Kavanagh, 3n, 93
Bylsma, John R., 22n, 26, 59, 82, 149n,
151–2, 155
- Cain, B., J. Ferejohn, and M. Fiorina, 3n,
93
Campion, G. F. M., 135
Cannon, John A., 56
Cecil, Gwendolen, 140
Charles, J., 5
Chester, D. N., and N. Bowring, 62
Clarke, P. F., 114
Close, D., 93, 121, 125
Conacher, J. B., 33n
Cooper, J., D. W. Brady, and P. A. Hur-
ley, 22n, 29n
Cornford, J. P., 7
Cox, Gary W., 107n, 117n
- Craig, F. W. S., 73, 74, 97n, 107n, 109,
112n
Cromwell, V., 6, 52, 66
Crouzet, François, 13
Davis, Lance E., and Robert A. Hutten-
back, 43, 76, 78, 158
Davis, Richard W., 72, 102n, 119, 148–9,
151–2
Deane, P., and W. A. Cole, 9, 13
Dickinson, G. Lowes, 39–40
Downs, Anthony, 30–1
Drake, M., 95
Duverger, M., 4, 126
Epstein, L. D., 84
Fair, John D., 22
Feuchtwanger, E. J., 44, 94, 137n
Fiorina, M. P., 27n, 150n
Floud, Roderick, and Donald McCloskey,
11–12
Franklin, C. H., 30n
Fraser, D., 56, 142n, 151
Fraser, P., 6, 48n, 49, 52, 66
Freeman, E. A., 140–1
- Gash, Norman, 35n, 38, 114, 119, 130
Gurowich, P. M., 50, 51n
Hamer, D. A., 68n, 70–1, 151
Hamilton, James C., 22n, 23, 42n, 153,
155
Hanham, H. J., 10, 35, 39, 41, 44, 97,
102, 114, 126–7n
Hardin, G., 6on
Hardin, R., 6on
Harris, R., 69
Heasman, D. J., 77
Howarth, P., 50n, 62–3
- Ilbert, C., 51

Author index

- Jackson, R. J., 30n, 84
James, C. J., 66
Jennings, W. Ivor, 82, 93, 169
Jones, W. D., and A. B. Erickson, 32n,
 33–4
Kebbel, J. E., 141
Key, V. O., 4n, 122n
Kingdon, J. W., 27n
Kitson-Clark, G. S. R., 114–15
Kousser, J. M., 5
LaPalombara, J., and M. Weiner, 4–5,
 126
Lloyd, T. O., 128n, 141
Lowell, A. L., 4, 21–3, 26n, 28, 32n, 34,
 50n, 54, 63n, 64, 75, 77, 81, 86,
 107, 108n, 132–4
Lowi, T., 133
Lucy, H., 82
MacDonagh, M., 69
MacDonagh, O., 45, 50
McKenzie, R. T., 11, 43n, 93
Mackintosh, J. P., 53, 80, 82, 84–5, 94,
 141, 169
Markus, G., 160n
Matthews, D., and J. Stimson, 30n
May, T. E., 16
Miller, W., 97
Mitchell, A., 22n, 56, 127
Mitchell, J. C., 94, 97, 105
Mitchell, J. C., and J. P. Cornford, 95
Moore, D. C., 114–15
Musson, A. E., 14–15
Nicholson, A. P., 55
Nossiter, T. J., 95, 97, 102n, 105, 106–
 7n, 114–15, 142n, 151, 156
O'Gorman, Frank, 115
Olney, R. J., 102n, 151
Ostrogorski, Mosei, 37–44, 121
Peltzman, S., 160n
Phillips, John A., 97, 106, 116
Pinto-Duschinsky, M., 125, 135
Plumb, John H., 5
Poole, K. T., and H. Rosenthal, 160n
Ramm, A., 52
Read, D., 17
Redlich, J., 6, 66
Saunders, W., 139
Schelling, T. C., 60n
Schwarz, J. E., 3n, 87
Silbey, Joel H., 27n
Smith, F. B., 69, 82–3, 85
Smith, Henry S., 97n, 112n
Speck, William A., and W. A. Gray, 97
Stenton, M., 76
Stephens, H. W., and D. W. Brady, 22n,
 26, 29n, 149n, 151
Stewart, R., 119–21, 124, 151
Tate, W. E., 16
Thomas, J. Alun, 126
Todd, A., 50, 51n
Vincent, J., and M. Stenton, 109, 112n
Vincent, John R., 13, 44, 120, 134, 148,
 160
Wald, Kenneth, 7, 94
Walkland, S. A., and M. Ryle, 3
Weber, M., 5, 126
Williams, O. C., 16
Willson, F. M. G., 76
Wilson, E., 115
Wilson, E. D. J., 126
Woodward, E. L., 81
Wooley, S. F., 55n
Wootton, G., 134

Subject index

- Althorp, Lord John Charles Spencer, Viscount, 47n
Anti-Corn Law League, 18, 71, 75
Aubrey, John, 71
Ballot Act (1872), 7, 10, 96, 141
Beaconsfield, *see* Disraeli, Benjamin
Birmingham Caucus, 38–9
Boer War, 85
Bonham, F. R., 119–20, 124
boroughs, pocket, 10
Bradlaugh, Charles, 150
bribery of electors, 7, 56–7, 113–14, 116, 122, 127
Cabinet: as executive body, 5, 45, 50–1, 135; desirability of positions in, 6, 65, 75–9, 91; legislative power of, 3, 5, 45, 47, 50–2, 60–1, 65, 75, 92, 132, 143; size of, 76–7, 91
Carlton Club, 34, 120
Carlyle, Thomas, 141
Chambers of Commerce, 17–18
Charles Street Committee (Conservative), 123–4
Childers, H. C. E., 95–6
Cobden, Richard, 84
cohesion, party, *see* party discipline
Conservative Central Office, 41
Conservative Workingmen's associations, 41, 43
constituencies and their MPs, 137, 145, 148–51
Corn laws and Conservative split, 29, 32, 35, 120, 125, 157
Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act (1883), 10–12, 136
Courtney, Leonard, 137
Derby, Edward George Stanley, 14th Earl of: and civil service reform, 35; and landlord influence, 115; and Radical re-form efforts, 125; and size of Cabinet, 77; and threats of dissolution of Parliament, 83, 86; "Derby Dilly" government, 124
Disraeli, Benjamin: and Congress of Berlin, 141; and dissolution of Parliament, 85; and importance of popular vote, 139–40; and "leap in the dark" (second Reform Act), 141; and MPs' use of questions, 62; and party organization, 120; and size of Cabinet, 77; as Protectionist, 32
Dissenters, disabilities of, 124
dissolution of Parliament, threats of, as political tool, 6–7, 80–7, 91, 145
distributive policies, 133–4
doctrine of electoral mandate, 140–1
efficient secret, 5–6, 45, 51, 52n, 61
elections: double-member, 92, 95–7, 138–9; number contested, 69, 127–8; percentage of MPs seeking and gaining re-election, 71–5; reasons for seeking, 68–9; two-against-one, 102, 112, 116, 138–9, 153; two-against-two, 102, 112, 138–9
electoral connection, 68–9, 75
electoral pressure: definition of, 149–51; diminution of, 170; *see also* pressure groups
enclosure, 15–16
extension of suffrage: and changing electoral strategies of MPs, 56–9; and forecasting elections, 127–8; and frequency of elections, 127–8; and increasing activity of MPs, 55–9; and party discipline in House of Commons, 128–9; and party organization, 126–8; and party voting in electorate, 105, 129–32, 169; and Radical Liberals, 125–6; and Reform Acts, 126

Subject index

- Fremantle, Thomas, 35
- Gladstone, William Ewart: and Conservative leadership, 33; and importance of popular support, 139–40; and ministerial power, 51; and patronage, 35, 133; and railroad legislation, 17; and threats of dissolution of Parliament, 82–3; as Peelite, 32; joins Liberals, 34
- Hartington Committee, 10
- Hawkins, Henry, 69
- Home Rule (Ireland), 126
- House of Commons: attendance at divisions in, 54, 58–9, 66; consequences of increased participation in, 65–7, 170; legislation, expansion of, 17–18, 52; number of MPs speaking in, 53, 55–8; votes of no confidence in, 80, 82–3; *see also* House of Commons procedures
- House of Commons procedures: back-bench resistance to changes in, 61–2; causes of changes in, 51–61; changes in, 46–51, 169; development of question period in, 62–3; Notice Days become “private members’ days,” 48; Notice Paper, 62; Order Book, 46–7, 49; Order Days, 46–8, 61; Orders of the Day, 46, 49, 61; private bills, 15–17
- House of Lords, 3, 61, 140, 169
- independence of MPs, 21–2, 33, 50, 51–2n, 62, 129–30
- industrialization, 11–13
- influence, electoral, 7, 10, 37–8, 113–17, 122–3, 148–9
- Irish church, 124, 140
- issues, importance of, to party system, 122–6, 148–9, 151–2
- Layard, A. H., 152–3
- MacDonald, Ramsay, 82
- Malthus, Thomas, 12
- mandate, doctrine of electoral, 140–1
- Melbourne, William Lamb, 2nd Viscount, 50
- Municipal Corporations Act (1835), 127
- National Liberal Federation, 37–41
- National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, 37–8, 41
- newspapers, *see* press
- non-partisan plumping, 95–7, 101–2, 106–14, 117–18, 120n
- non-partisan voting, 103–15, 117–18, 120–5, 132, 138–9
- North Northamptonshire Liberal Association, 40
- Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1853), 35, 133
- Palmerston, Henry Temple, 3rd Viscount, 125
- Parliament Act (1911), 169
- party discipline, House of Commons: after second Reform Act, 91; and crossbench dissent, 152–9, 161–3; and extension of suffrage, 128–9; and index of unity definition, 25; and local electoral pressure, 28–9, 145–7, 161; and ministerial ambition, 6, 68, 75–9, 91; and party vote definition, 22; and Peelites, 32–4; and threats of dissolution, 6–7, 80–7, 145–6; decreases in, 21, 32–3, 87, 93; definition of, 27; increases in, 28–31, 39–40, 66–7, 93; parallel with U.S. electoral college, 143–4; rebound theory of, 32, 34–6; theory of, 21–7; *see also* independence of MPs
- party labels, 128–30, 144–5
- party nominations, 145
- party organization: and ability to punish MPs, 27, 37–9, 121; and extension of suffrage, 119, 126–9; and party discipline, 39–44, 121; and party voting in electorate, 119–20; determinants of, 126–8; in census of Conservative associations, 41–2; pattern of development of, 119–20; *see also* Birmingham Caucus; Carlton Club; Conservative Central Office; Conservative Workingmen’s associations; National Liberal Federation; National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations; North Northamptonshire Liberal Association
- party system: definition of, 122; fluctuations in, 122–3
- party voting in electorate, *see* voting behavior of electors
- patronage, 35, 56–7, 133, 169–70
- Peel, Robert: and Corn Law repeal, 32, 120; and increased participation by MPs, 59; and independence of MPs, 33, 50, 62, 130; and railroads, 17; and size of Cabinet, 77; and Tamworth Manifesto, 170; and threats of resignation of government, 82; death of, 33
- Peelite: and party uncertainty, 32–4; and Protectionists, 156–7; and split voting, 110; considered as separate party, 21, 107–10
- pledges, 70
- pocket boroughs, 10
- political parties: as key determinant of voting, 3–4, 7–8, 91–5, 118, 135–6; development of, 4, 122–6; differences in voting patterns among, 107–12, 154–60, 164–5; dominance of, over local pressures, 145–7

Subject index

- Pollington, Viscount, 96
press: and development of party feeling in electorate, 120–2; and repeal of “taxes on knowledge,” 13–14, 94, 120; coverage of Parliament by, 49, 54–5, 134–5; expansion of, 13–15, 54–5, 94
pressure groups, 17–18, 70–1, 75, 170; *see also* Anti-Corn Law League; Chambers of Commerce; pledges
private members: and legislative initiative, 59–60, 62, 132; and particularistic legislation, 132–5; and power to amend legislation, 63–4; and rise of party voting, 92, 132; as internal lobbyist, 134; decline in influence of, 45, 48–52, 59–62, 64–5, 92, 132–6, 143; traditional parliamentary rights of, 45–6
Protectionists, 32–4
railroads, 13–17; legislation concerning, 16–17, 134
Redistribution Act (1884), 156
reelection rates, *see* elections
Reform Act, first (1832), 9–10, 62, 123, 126–7
Reform Act, second (1867), 10, 37–9, 125, 128–9, 141, 145; and fear of dissolution, 82
Reform Act, third (1885), 11, 94, 126, 144
Reform Acts: significance of, for voting behavior, 69, 95, 103–5, 113, 122, 126, 132; *see also* extension of suffrage
Rose, Philip, 120, 125
Russell, John, 1st Earl, 50n, 61–2
Salisbury, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of, 82, 140
Spencer, Robert, 40
split voting, 7–8, 92–3, 95–7, 101–7, 115–19, 120n, 121–2, 124, 159; and constituency size, 106, 130–2; and crossbench dissent, 152–9, 162, 164–5; and growing legislative power of Cabinet, 132, 134–6, 142; and political issues, 116, 151–7, 159–61; decline in, 92–3, 106–13, 135–6, 142; regional variations in, 106–7, 122–3
Stamp Act, repeal of, 94, 120
suffrage, *see* extension of suffrage
viva voce voting, 7, 94, 113, 116
voting behavior of electors: and size of constituency, 57–9; candidate-oriented, 65, 91–3, 114, 118, 134–6, 138–9; party-oriented, 3–4, 65, 91–4, 118–20, 134–46; straight ticket, 121, 130, 139, 142–3; *see also* non-partisan plumping; non-partisan voting; split voting
voting behavior of MPs: and cost of information, 30–1; cue-taking and perfect information models, 27–8, 30
Waterhouse, Samuel, 95–6
whipped divisions, 22–6, 66, 78
whips, party, 42, 63–4, 66, 83, 85, 121, 146
Wood, Charles, 51