

# The Emergence of Party-Based Political Careers in the UK, 1801-1918

Gary W. Cox\*  
Tobias Nowacki†

*Conditionally Accepted at the Journal of Politics*

## Abstract

We document the emergence of nomination and office hierarchies within the 19th-century UK parties and the development of norms that ensured incumbent re-nomination and seniority progression through those hierarchies. We offer a property rights theory of why these norms developed; and show that the reform acts, which reduced the influence of patronal peers and increased party-centered voting, were the main drivers of development. The overall effect was to transform a system in which political careers were only loosely organized by the parties into one in which they dominated career prospects.

**Key words:** nomination control; seniority systems; British political development

**Acknowledgments:** We thank Jon Fiva and Sebastian Saiegh for their helpful comments.

---

\*William Bennett Munro Professor of Political Science, Stanford University, Calif., USA.  
gwcox@stanford.edu

†Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science, Stanford University, Calif., USA. tnowacki@stanford.edu

# 1 Introduction

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, would-be members of the United Kingdom's House of Commons secured their nominations by leveraging family connections and seeking the patronage of landed magnates (Sack 1980). Yet, by the 20th century, nominations were controlled by national and local party organizations (Ostrogorski 1901). How and when did electoral careers based on family and aristocratic networks give way to party-based careers?

Recent work examining the class and dynastic composition of the House of Commons (e.g. Berlinski, Dewan, and Van Coppenolle 2014; Van Coppenolle 2017; Fresh 2020) has illuminated the *decline* of families and magnates as avenues into political careers. In this paper, we look at the flip side—the *rise* of parties.

Focusing on the first century after the union with Ireland (1801-1918), we highlight two consequences of the reform acts (in 1832, 1867 and 1884) that affected politicians' career opportunities. First, after each reform act, the number of constituencies controlled by patronal peers ("patronal constituencies") declined and the number of constituencies where nominations were controlled through local and central party institutions ("partisan constituencies") increased. Second, after each reform act, voters became more party-centered (Cox 1987). This meant that nomination in a district safe for one's own party increasingly ensured victory, while nomination in a district safe for the other party increasingly ensured defeat.

We view these two structural shifts as creating a "nomination hierarchy" within each party. At the bottom were constituencies safe for the other party, in the middle were competitive districts, and at the top were constituencies safe for one's own party. Since everyone wanted seats that were safer for their own party, the emergence of the nomination hierarchy should have sparked intra-party competition for nominations.

Exploiting two main datasets—one documenting British MPs' electoral and office-holding histories over the period 1835-1918 (Eggers and Spirling 2014) and one providing similar information for the pre-reform era (which we compiled from the History of Parliament Trust and Smith (1973))—we examine four consequences that more partisan constituencies, more

party-centered voting, and more intra-party competition should have produced. First, increasingly party-centered voting should have increased the share of partisan constituencies that were “safe” for one of the parties. We show that the distribution of seats did skew toward “safe”, especially after the third reform act. Second, incumbent re-nomination norms should have emerged as spontaneous (Sugden 1986) or leadership-encouraged (Riker and Sened 1991) ways of regulating internecine fights over nominations. We rely on regression discontinuity designs to explore the development of such norms. Third, first-time parliamentary candidates should have been forced to begin their careers in difficult constituencies, since the most valuable nominations would be claimed by incumbents and those “next in line” to claim winnable nominations. To show this, we compare cohorts of new candidates just before and after each reform act, showing that the post-reform cohorts were nominated in significantly less winnable constituencies. Fourth, candidates should increasingly have switched constituencies before winning their first terms in parliament, a pattern that we also document.

Political careers did not stop once a seat in the House of Commons had been obtained. MPs sought higher offices, culminating in cabinet posts. Consistent with the idea that intra-party competition for such posts produced regular career paths, we identify “stepping-stone” offices that were particularly associated with later ministerial service. We also provide evidence that the modern practice of parties protecting their leaders by giving them safe constituencies appears in the period we study. Finally, we provide evidence that progress through the emerging nomination and office hierarchies was contingent on a member being sufficiently loyal to the party whip.

Our work contributes to several literatures. First, and most directly, it explores the historical development of political parties in the UK (Cox 1987; Eggers and Spirling 2014; Eggers and Spirling 2016; Kam and Newson 2021). A party’s ability to control who its nominees are, and who represents it in cabinet, are defining features of political parties in modern parliamentary regimes—yet there is no sustained examination of when and why British par-

ties established this ability and how they dealt with the resulting intra-party competition. Second, we contribute to the broader comparative literature that examines political “seniority systems.” Most of these studies focus on the use of seniority to regulate legislators’ access to various offices (e.g. Epstein et al. 1997; Jenkins 1998; McKelvey and Riezman 1993; Muthoo and Shepsle 2014). Here, we investigate the relatively under-studied topic of how parties use seniority to regulate candidates’ access to nomination spots (cf. Cirone, Cox, and Fiva 2020). Third, our findings relate to studies of political careers, including classical analyses of “political ambition” (Schlesinger 1966; Rohde 1979) and investigations of legislators’ activity levels over their career cycles (Bailer and Ohmura 2018; Høyland, Hobolt, and Hix 2019).

## 2 The Development of British Political Parties

By the end of the 19th century, Britain’s political parties dominated access to office in both the electoral and legislative arenas. In the electoral arena, party leaders exerted significant influence over nominations (Ranney 1965) and voters reliably supported their parties’ nominees (Butler and Stoke 1971). Within the House of Commons, the majority party’s leaders controlled nominations to ministerial and other posts (Cox 1987) and MPs reliably supported their parties’ leaders on whipped votes (Lowell 1902; Eggers and Spirling 2016).

In the first three decades of the 19th century, parties dominated access to office much less. In the electoral arena, control of about one third of all nominations was decentralized to between 90 and 101 patronal peers (Sack 1980, p. 919) and 22% of voters split their votes between the parties (Cox 1987, p. 105). In the legislative arena, factions vied for both high office and members’ support (Hill 1985, pp. 15–18) and party cohesion in the division lobbies was relatively weak (Hawkins 1998, p. 72).

Things began to change in the 1830s, as the parties formally organized. In the electoral arena, the parties established associations throughout the country to manage the new electoral registries mandated by the first reform act (Salmon 2009)—and fewer voters split their

votes (see Figure 1). Both the upward trend in organization and the downward trend in split voting continued after the second and third reform acts. In the legislative arena, the parties founded their modern whip organizations in the early 1830s (Cox 1992; Sainty and Cox 1997)—which helped stabilize the parties in two senses. First, the percent of English MPs with identifiable party affiliations increased from about 85% to 100% and the rate at which MPs switched their party affiliations declined from about 9% to 1%, with both these changes persisting throughout the century.<sup>1</sup> Second, voting cohesion improved substantially, with smaller improvements throughout the remainder of the century (Cox 1987; Eggers and Spirling 2016).

The 1830s also saw important changes in the structure of electoral competition. The Great Reform Act of 1832 abolished 57 of the so-called “rotten” or “nomination” boroughs, where the patronal peer’s nomination was tantamount to election (Sack 1980). As Figure 1 shows, this reduced the percentage of constituencies that were patronal from over 50% to about 14%, with a further reduction occurring after the third reform act. As patronal constituencies declined, the proportion of constituencies that were contested naturally increased (as Figure 1 also shows). At the same time, however, the share of seats that were safe for one party increased (on which more below).

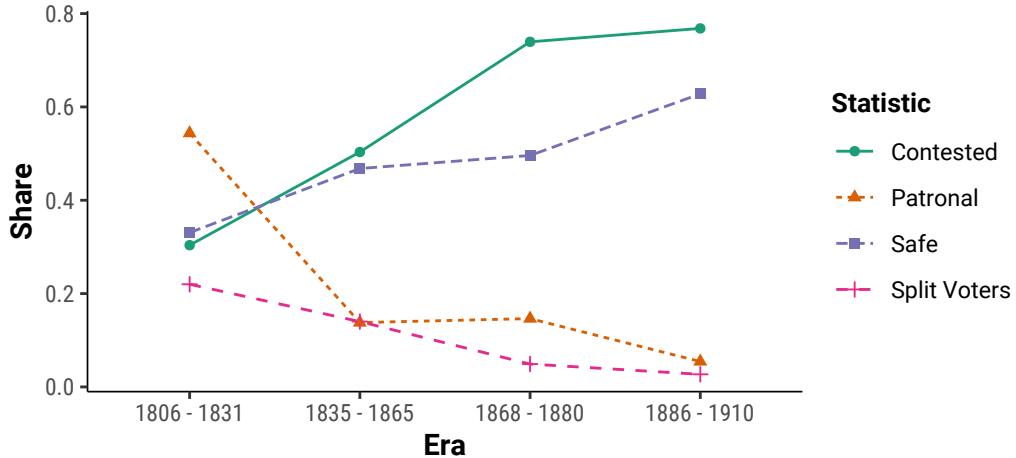
Also beginning in the 1830s, the parties increasingly sought to influence nominations. Some early examples (from 1831) involved Prime Minister Charles Grey prevailing upon a borough patron to use his seats to accommodate two cabinet ministers defeated at the general election; and Chief Whip Edward Ellice convincing a member to relinquish his seat to another cabinet minister in need of a seat.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, the whips’ electoral role increased. By 1868, the chief whip had incorporated the electoral organization of the party into his office, forming a single party headquarters (Thompson 1948). During that year’s general election, the Liberals’ whips aimed to find

---

<sup>1</sup>Authors’ calculations based on party identifications in Smith (1973) and Eggers and Spirling (2014).

<sup>2</sup>See <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/bletchingley> and <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/vivian-sir-richard-1775-1842>.



**Figure 1: Share of patronal, contested, and safe constituencies and share of ballots with votes split between parties, averaged by period.** The green solid line shows the average share of constituencies contested by both parties. Purple dashed lines show the share of safe constituencies among those contested. Orange dotted lines show the share of patronal constituencies, as coded from Sack (1980) for the pre-reform era, Gash (1977, appendix D) for 1832-67, and Hanham (1959, Appendix iii) for 1867 and beyond. Gash covered only boroughs, whereas Sack and Hanham covered both boroughs and counties. If both Sack and Hanham listed a county as patronal, then we coded it as patronal in the intervening period as well. Pink dashed lines show the average per cent of voters splitting their votes between parties in each era, as reported by Cox (1987, p. 105).

candidates “for all seats that were not Tory preserves” (p. 192), to manage and disburse the party’s electoral funds (p. 194), and to convince “superfluous candidates” to stand down (p. 198). In pursuing these aims, the whips were not in a position to dictate the choices made by local nominating bodies, only to offer help in finding suitable candidates. That said, by the first World War the whips’ influence had grown enough that they were able to arrange a general truce between the coalition parties, so that no party challenged the others in constituencies where their incumbents retired (Walter 2018).

Another development affecting nominations was that party-affiliated clubs began to maintain lists of suitable candidates in the 1830s (Thevoz 2018, pp. 199–200). Would-be candidates quickly sought to get onto those lists. By the first post-reform parliament, over 80% of all MPs had club affiliations, and this number stabilized at around 95% by the parliament of 1837-41 (Thevoz 2018, p. 56). Moreover, the party whips took an active interest in who

got onto the club lists (Thevoz 2018, pp. 156–175).

As regards high executive offices, the prime minister had assumed the power of nomination—which meant advising the monarch to appoint a certain person to a certain post—soon after the Glorious Revolution. MPs whom the monarch appointed then faced two screenings. First, they were required to resign their seat in the House of Commons and stand for re-election in a by-election. Second, although they did not face an investiture vote in parliament, they could be removed via a vote of no confidence. This double screening meant that each party’s influence over its voters’ and MPs’ behavior could directly affect members’ tenure in office.

### 3 Intra-party competition and re-nomination norms

When a particular good is both scarce and homogeneously valued, competition over its possession is expected to generate property-like claims (Alchian and Demsetz 1972; Sugden 1986; Riker and Sened 1991). This basic insight has been applied to nominations by scholars such as Shepsle and Weingast (1984), Coats and Dalton (1992), and Jenkins (1998), and we do so here as well.

Because British candidates faced no residency requirements, they could seek nomination in any constituency. This feature, along with parliament’s supremacy after the Glorious Revolution (North and Weingast 1989), ensured that nominations were *scarce*—many persons potentially sought any given nomination.

Assuming they mainly wanted to win, the value that candidates assigned to being nominated in a given constituency would simply have been their probability of being elected (once nominated). Thus, as candidates came to believe that constituencies could be ranked along a spectrum from “safe” for their own party to “safe” for the other party, and that any credible candidate from their party would have a similar chance of victory in any given constituency, all co-partisans would have perceived a clear hierarchy of nominations over

which they might compete. We argue that, as intra-party competition for homogeneously valued nominations increased, incumbent re-nomination norms should have arisen through a combination of incumbents' and leaders' efforts.

The case for incumbent-led emergence is given by Sugden (1986), who models property rights in general as conventions corresponding to the dictum that "possession is nine-tenths of the law." Applied to nominations, Sugden's theory predicts that incumbents—those currently "in possession" of the nomination spot they last received—would be expected to defend their spots in equilibrium, thereby motivating potential challengers to look elsewhere.

Leaders might support incumbents' claims to re-nomination, either because they had helped them secure their nominations in the first place or simply to avoid internecine fights (cf. Riker and Sened (1991)). More broadly, party leaders should have promoted conventional career paths—both in the nomination and office hierarchies—in order to help prevent party members expending scarce resources fighting amongst themselves, thereby freeing those resources up for the inter-party fight.

## 4 The Emergence of Safe Seats

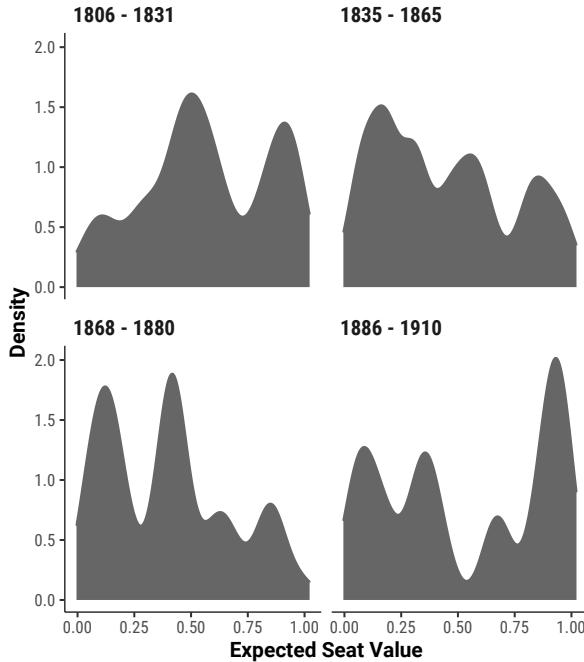
In this section, we explore how the number of safe seats evolved over time. To that end, let  $C_{ct}$  denote the two-party share of seats that the Conservatives hold in constituency  $c$  after general election  $t$ , and  $U_{ct}$  be a dummy variable indicating whether  $c$  was uncontested at general election  $t$ .<sup>3</sup> We estimate the expected (two-party) share of seats that the Conservatives will win in constituency  $c$  at election  $t$  by fitting a separate linear regression for each election:

$$\mathbb{E}[C_{ct}] = \beta_{0t} + \beta_{1t} C_{c,t-1} + \beta_{2t} U_{c,t-1} + \beta_{3t} C_{c,t-1} \times U_{c,t-1} \quad (1)$$

Equation 1 predicts the Conservatives' seat share using an intercept, the Conservatives'

---

<sup>3</sup>We follow Eggers and Spirling (2014) in coding MPs' party affiliations after 1832: MPs are designated as Conservative if labeled as 'C' or 'LU' (Liberal Unionist) in the original dataset; as Liberal if labeled as 'L'. We also include 92 candidates after 1885 that are listed as affiliated with one of the two parties.



**Figure 2: Constituencies became more partisan over time.** The figure shows the pooled distribution of expected Conservative seat shares across constituencies, by reform era. We leave out the elections of 1832 and 1885 due to redistricting.

lagged seat share, the lagged contest status, and the interaction of the two.<sup>4</sup>

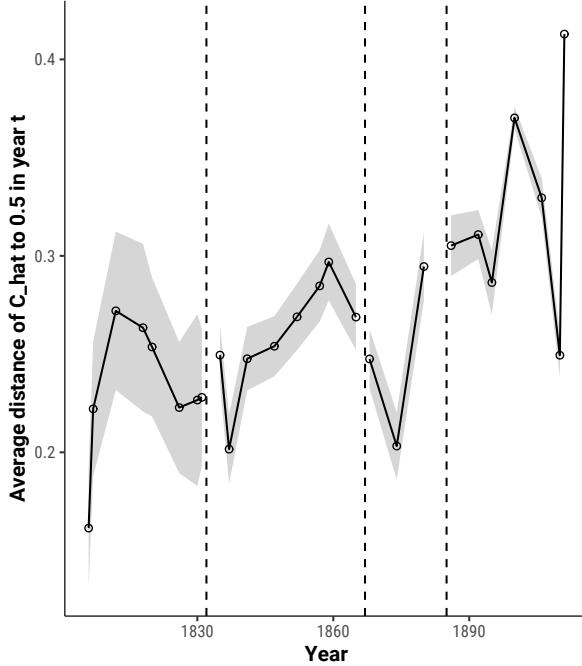
We interpret the fitted values,  $\hat{C}_{ct}$ , as proxies for how contemporaries viewed the Conservatives' chances of winning based on the last election's result. Conservatives (Tories) would have preferred being nominated in constituencies with higher values of  $\hat{C}_{ct}$ , while Liberals (Whigs) would have had the opposite preference.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of  $\hat{C}_{ct}$  in four different eras: (1) pre-reform (1806 - 1831); (2) after the First Reform Act (1835 - 1865); (3) after the Second Reform Act (1868 - 1880); (4) after the Third Reform Act (1886 - 1911).<sup>5</sup> During the first period, there was a substantial “middle mode”, corresponding to districts that returned one Conservative and

---

<sup>4</sup>Kam and Newson (2021) measure seats' Conservative/Liberal tendencies based on exogenous factors (e.g., workforce in agriculture). Our approach fits the data better (with an  $R^2$  of 0.48 versus their 0.09) and is based on a simple heuristic that should have been readily available to contemporary politicians.

<sup>5</sup>We drop the first election year in each period, as our estimates are based on lagged data and many constituencies were redrawn at each reform act. We also restrict this and all subsequent analyses to candidates standing in non-patronal constituencies in England, Wales, and Scotland (thus excluding Ireland, where the Home Rule Movement perturbed the two-party system).



**Figure 3: Constituencies became safer over time.** The figure shows the average absolute distance to a perfectly competitive seat in each year, computed as:  $\sum_c |\hat{C}_{ct} - 0.5| / N_t$ , where  $N_t$  is the number of partisan constituencies in year  $t$ . The following elections were excluded due to missing data associated with redistricting: 1832, 1885.

one Liberal. This mode shrank after each reform act, disappearing after the third, when virtually all double-member districts were replaced by single-member districts (Appendix K shows that seat safety increased even in the remaining two-seat districts).

The collapse of the middle mode meant that there was a larger stock of safe Conservative and Liberal seats than there had been previously. Figure 3 illustrates this by graphing the average safeness of districts, measured by  $|\hat{C}_{ct} - 0.5|$ , across time. As can be seen, average safeness increased after the first and third Reform Acts.<sup>6</sup>

All told, the nomination hierarchy within each party should have become significantly clearer after the first and especially the third reform act. At the same time, the patronal constituencies that remained outside the parties' growing nomination hierarchies were declining in number. Thus, we expect increasing pressure to regulate intra-party competition for the valuable nominations that party leaders could influence.

---

<sup>6</sup> Appendix C reports on the evolution of safeness for patronal constituencies.

## 5 Intra-party competition for nominations

To examine the nature of intra-party competition for nominations, we consider the stages of a typical parliamentary career. What were candidates' first parliamentary nominations like? When they won, how did victory affect their prospects for future re-nomination or "promotion" to a better constituency? We tackle these questions in reverse chronological order, beginning in this section with the effects of winning.

### 5.1 Data

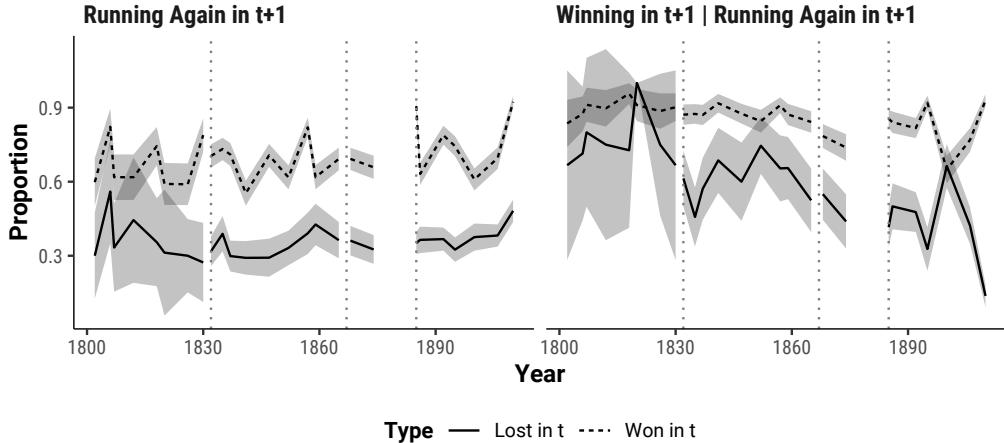
We rely on the British Political Development database (Eggers and Spirling 2014) for the period after 1832. For the period 1801-1831, we compiled similar data from the History of Parliament Trust and Smith (1973).

A major challenge is that candidates' names vary across time. In addition to facing two clear discontinuities (1832, 1885) in how names were encoded in our data, some candidates' names changed over time even within periods of consistent coding—for example, when they gained additional honorifics. To deal with name changes, we processed names by dropping honorific titles and standardizing their format.<sup>7</sup>

As before, we run our analyses on non-paternal constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales (excluding Ireland). As the elections of December 1910 and 1918 presented highly unusual circumstances for new candidates, we restrict our analysis to elections prior to December 1910.<sup>8</sup> We also exclude the two election years preceding the coding and district

<sup>7</sup>For post-1832 candidates, we converted all names to lowercase, dropped honorifics, and only retained the initials of every part except for the full surname. *William Ewart Gladstone* thus becomes *w e gladstone*. Shortening first and middle names to initials is (unfortunately) necessary because the Eggers-Spirling database only maintains initials for unsuccessful candidates in most cases. We can check this procedure's success in the post-1832 period by using the unique IDs that Eggers and Spirling assigned for the time each MP actually sat in parliament. Furthermore, for a random sample of 100 MPs' names whose candidacies and tenures we can compare with the data from the History of Parliament Trust, we only found one person whose records after standardizing names did not match all candidacies within one era (pre-1832; 1832-1885; 1885-1910). Since candidates' names may still change (especially with middle initials dropped or added) across the 1832 and 1885 changes in the data, we exclude these elections where relevant, e.g. to avoid inflating the number of 'new' candidates.

<sup>8</sup>The short interval between the two 1910 elections meant that very few new candidates entered in the



**Figure 4: Non-incumbents face a harder time being nominated again, and winning again.** The figure shows the proportion of winning and losing candidates who ran again in the next election (left panel); and the proportions winning, conditional on running again (right panel). Elections before redistricting (1831, 1880) excluded.

discontinuity (1831, 1880). Lastly, we exclude candidates who ran for both parties at different points in time.

## 5.2 Aggregate statistics

Figure 4 shows how winning affected the proportion of candidates running again (left panel) and, conditional on running again, winning (right panel). As can be seen in the left panel, winners were about thirty percentage points more likely to run again than losers, with the gap being fairly stable over time. In the right panel, in contrast, we see a clear trend, occasionally interrupted by landslide elections (such as 1906). Prior to the first reform act, winners were only slightly more likely to win again, conditional on running, than were losers. But this gap then widens steadily across the century, reaching up to forty percentage points after the third reform act. This is consistent with the idea that incumbents were increasingly favored in the competition to get nominations in winnable constituencies.

---

December election; the 1918 election was unusually late due to the First World War and was also contested by a National Government.

### 5.3 Regression discontinuity designs

The evidence just presented, while suggestive, is muddled by concerns about selection. To mitigate such concerns, we use regression discontinuity designs to investigate whether bare winners differed from bare losers in their likelihood of running again in the next election. To the extent that bare winners and losers are as-if randomly assigned, any advantage that the former enjoyed over the latter will reveal the causal effect of past winning (inc incumbency) on future re-nomination and winning.<sup>9</sup>

We define the forcing variable in each constituency by averaging the vote share of the last winner and the first runner-up, and then subtracting this average from each candidate's vote share. For example, in a four-candidate two-seat constituency in which the vote shares were  $V_1 > V_2 > V_3 > V_4$ , we compute  $T = (V_2 + V_3)/2$  and  $e_j = V_j - T$  for  $j = 1, 2, 3, 4$ . The running variable  $e_j$  indicates how many percentage points above (or below) the threshold  $T$  candidate  $j$ 's vote share is.

The response variables we investigate are whether a candidate runs again in the next election in any constituency and whether a candidate wins a seat in the next election. We restrict attention to candidates who remained in the same party (either Conservative or Liberal) at time  $t$  and  $t - 1$  and ran in non-patronal seats in England, Scotland and Wales.<sup>10</sup>

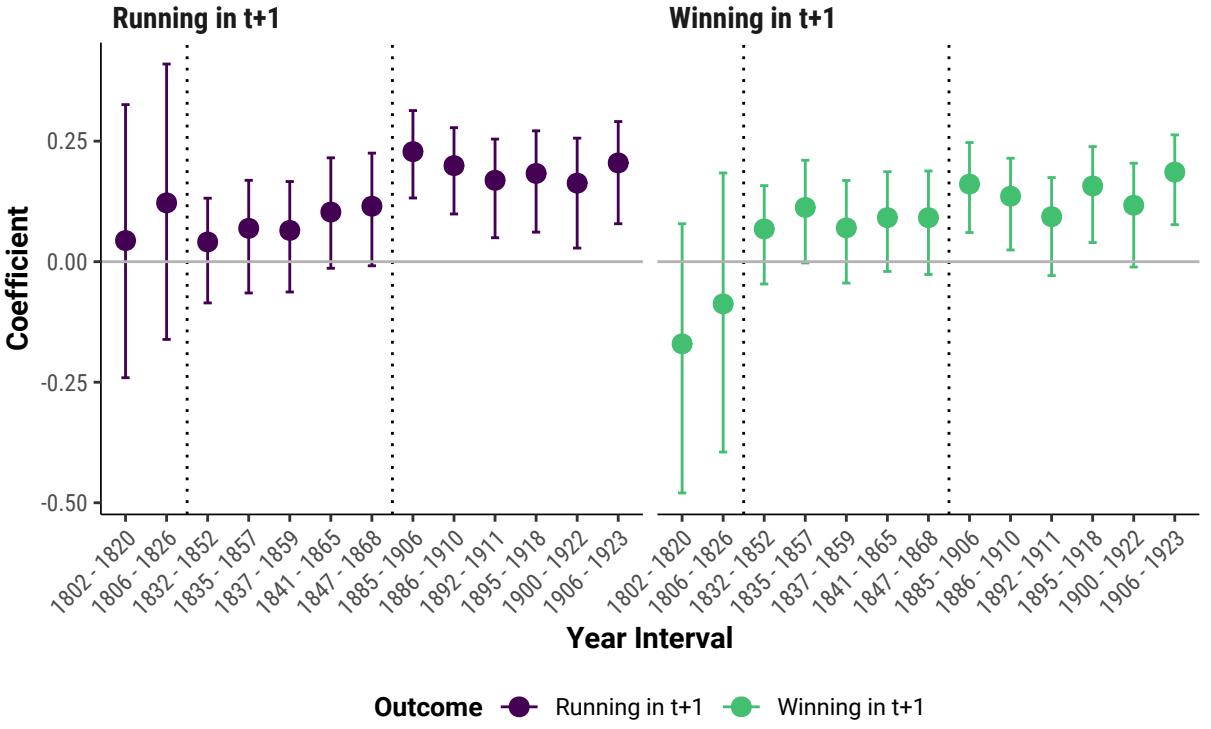
Since fitting the regression discontinuity on every election separately would yield noisy estimates, we group the data into a moving window covering five general elections.<sup>11</sup> The window moves incrementally within three periods: pre-reform (1802-1826), between the first and third reform acts (1832-1874), and after the third reform act (1886-1923). As before, we exclude post-reform elections. That is, the last pre-1832 window is 1806-1826, while the first post-1832 window is 1832-1852, and there is a similar jump in 1885. Figure 5 shows our

---

<sup>9</sup>See a large literature about contemporary incumbency effects and difficulties with causal interpretation (e.g. Caughey and Sekhon 2011; Eggers, Fowler, et al. 2015). Appendix H provides evidence that candidates do not sort themselves around the winning threshold.

<sup>10</sup>We restrict our analysis to non-patronal seats given that the remaining patronal constituencies were rarely contested. In contrast to other parts of the paper, our results here include a longer time span (until 1923) to investigate any changes in the effect towards the end of our sample period.

<sup>11</sup>Appendix G reports the results of the regression discontinuity run on each year separately.



**Figure 5: Incumbents develop an advantage in re-nomination and winning over time.** Figure shows regression discontinuity estimates in a moving window spanning 5 elections. Error bars indicate 95% robust confidence interval around point estimates. Appendix F reports the formal estimates for each specification.

results for running again (left panel) and winning (not conditional on running) (right panel).

### 5.3.1 Winning and running again

Bare winners and losers should have differed in their probability of re-running for two main reasons. First, the losers should have been more likely than the winners to voluntarily drop out of electoral politics. Regardless of the stage of their career, almost winning would probably have encouraged many politicians to try again; but actually winning would have encouraged them even more. Second, in the non-patronal constituencies, bare losers of seats perceived as winnable should have been more likely than bare winners of such seats to be de-selected, since the sin of under-performance was less pardonable if it cost a seat.

The left panel of Figure 5 shows a more consistent and more precisely estimated in-

cumbency effect after the first reform, and especially after the third reform act. The effect reaches almost a twenty-five percentage point advantage near the end of the time series.

### 5.3.2 Winning and winning again

Our discussion thus far has focused only on the probability of dropping out of politics (voluntarily or via deselection). But winners can be rewarded by their parties' nominators in two ways—by being re-nominated; and by being given a “better” constituency. Thus, we should also consider whether bare winners secured more winnable spots than bare losers. To address this, we examine how the probability of winning at  $t$  depended on performance at  $t - 1$ .

Note that both bare losers and bare winners self-select whether to run again. Thus, the composition of unobservables among bare losers *who run again* may differ from the composition of unobservables among bare winners *who run again*, even if the sets of all bare winners and all bare losers are balanced. This selection issue, widely recognized in the recent literature, has motivated several scholars to recommend that RD analyses focus on *unconditional* incumbency effects (De Magalhaes 2015; Dahlgaard 2016; Hyttinen et al. 2018). Instead of conditioning on re-running, which is causally downstream from the treatment (and risks creating imbalance), these scholars include all bare losers and bare winners at  $t - 1$  in their samples and ask whether winning at  $t - 1$  affects winning at  $t$ . We follow this procedure here.

To explain our approach further, let  $z_{t-1}$  denote lagged win margin and  $p_{jt}(z_{t-1})$  be a candidate’s probability of securing a nomination in constituency  $j$  at time  $t$ , conditional on their lagged win margin. Let  $q_{jt}$  be the probability of winning, if nominated in constituency  $j$  at time  $t$ . We view candidates who fail to secure any re-nomination as receiving a nomination in constituency 0, conferring a probability  $q_{0t} = 0$  of winning; and denote their probability of receiving that “nomination” by  $p_{0t}(z_{t-1})$ . A candidate can end up in constituency 0 through death, voluntary withdrawal from electoral politics, or by seeking but failing to secure a

nomination. Otherwise, they receive a nomination in constituency  $j \in \{1, \dots, J\}$ .<sup>12</sup>

Given the notation just introduced, the unconditional probability of winning at time  $t$  can be written  $\sum_{j=0}^J p_{jt}(z_{t-1})q_{jt}$ . Our RD recovers the change in  $\sum_{j=0}^J p_{jt}(z_{t-1})q_{jt}$  at the discontinuity ( $z_{t-1} = 0$ ).<sup>13</sup> This change summarizes how winning affects a candidate's chances of securing nominations in constituencies  $0, 1, \dots, J$ , while weighting each constituency by the candidate's probability of winning a seat if nominated there. The more that winning depresses  $p_{0t}$ , raises the probability of re-nomination in the same constituency, and improves the chance of securing nomination in a better constituency, the larger the effect of winning at  $t - 1$  on winning at  $t$  will be. Thus, an unconditional analysis of winning allows us to assess the combined effects of incumbent re-nomination (in the same constituency) and seniority progression (to better constituencies).<sup>14</sup>

Our results, shown in the right-hand panel of Figure 5, show that winning had a positive but insignificant effect on winning again after the first reform act, with the effect becoming larger and statistically significant at conventional levels after the third reform act. Between the first and third reform acts, re-nomination was not tantamount to re-election. The reasons for this included poor coordination between co-partisan candidates (Kam and Newson 2021), variations over time in whether a constituency was actually contested, and relatively high levels of split voting. After the third reform act, almost all districts were of single-member magnitude, many more were regularly contested, and almost all voters were party-centered. Thus, each party's incumbents typically sat in districts that were safe for their party, so that

---

<sup>12</sup>We ignore the possibility that candidates run simultaneously in more than one constituency, something that about 5% of candidates did in the pre-reform era, and about 1% of candidates did after the first reform act. Appendix D documents the share of candidates with multiple nominations in any given election year.

<sup>13</sup>We follow Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titunik (2014)'s procedure for optimal bandwidth selection. All estimates are fitted with first-order polynomials. Appendix I replicates the analysis with second-order polynomials. The results are essentially the same for running again in  $t + 1$  but are insignificant after 1885 for winning in  $t + 1$ .

<sup>14</sup>Our view of how winning at  $t - 1$  affects winning at  $t$  differs substantially from studies of the incumbency advantage in the US, which have typically assumed that (a) candidates can only run in a single district and (b) voters are candidate-centered. Given those assumptions, the incumbency advantage has been viewed as stemming mainly from incumbency improving a candidate's expected vote share in the general election. In our case, assumptions (a) and (b) do not hold: candidates could run in any constituency and voters were increasingly party-centered. Thus, the mechanisms thought to be at play in the US case are largely absent in the post-1832 UK, so that our RD estimates can be interpreted mainly as showing re-nomination effects.

re-nomination meant re-election.

## 6 Humble Beginnings

As incumbent re-nomination norms emerged, other patterns should have become more evident in members' careers. First, each party might have sought to reduce intra-party competition for 'open' spots, created by the retirement of incumbents, by outlining conventional career paths. Writing in the early 20th century, Lowell (1902, p. 51) noted that if multiple Conservatives sought the same nomination, party leaders sought to "persuade all but one of them to withdraw," with "the disinterestedness of the man who withdraws naturally [giving] him a certain claim to future consideration."

Second, those wishing to begin a parliamentary career should increasingly have found that the winnable spots for their party were already occupied by incumbents and those on conventional career paths, motivating them to begin their careers by contesting "unwinnable" seats. Lloyd (1965, p. 265) has claimed that "by 1910 contesting a hopeless seat was accepted as a way for a politician to earn the gratitude of his party." In this section, we consider when new politicians began to accept "humble beginnings" in the form of "unwinnable" initial assignments.<sup>15</sup>

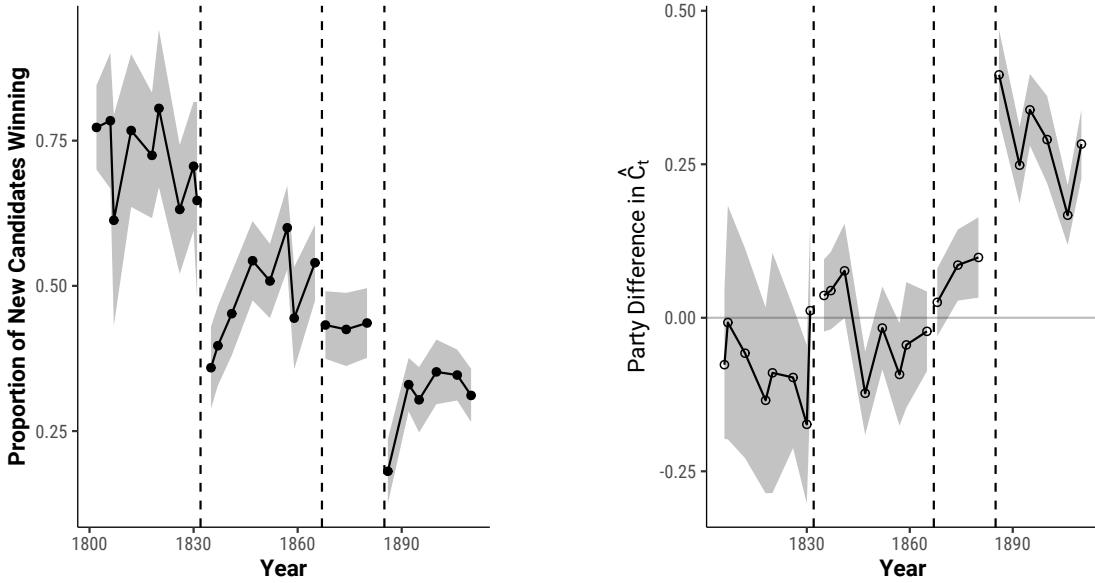
The left panel of Figure 6 shows the proportion of each new cohort winning. For first-time candidates, the probability of winning steps down considerably after each of the first three reform acts. Whereas a clear majority of first-timers won before the First Reform Act, only a third did so (on average) after the Third Reform Act.<sup>16</sup>

The right-hand panel of Figure 6 presents the data in a somewhat different way. Let  $\hat{C}_{Lib,t}$  denote the mean predicted conservatism of the constituencies in which the new Liberal

---

<sup>15</sup>Members' pre-parliamentary careers are beyond the scope of the present investigation. However, we can make one observation. In some countries, local offices are common stepping-stones toward a parliamentary career (Cirone, Cox, and Fiva 2020). In the 19th century UK, however, Lowell (1902, p. 50) reported that there were no feeder offices, tenure of which predicted receipt of (first-time) parliamentary nominations. Indeed, "a man frequently goes into the House of Commons without holding previously any elective office. This might, in fact, be considered the general rule."

<sup>16</sup>Note that landslide elections, like the Liberal win in 1906, are outliers.



**Figure 6: New candidates become less successful and start in worse seats over time.** The figure on the left shows the proportion of first-time candidates winning, by election year. The figure on the right shows the difference in predicted Conservative seat share between Conservative and Liberal first-time candidates, by election year. The following elections were excluded due to missing data associated with redistricting: 1832, 1885

cohort ran in year  $t$ , and  $\hat{C}_{Con,t}$  be the corresponding figure for the new Conservative cohort. The right-hand panel plots the difference,  $\Delta_t = \hat{C}_{Lib,t} - \hat{C}_{Con,t}$ , across time. In the pre-reform era, both new Liberals and new Conservatives appear to have gravitated toward winnable constituencies, producing a negative value for  $\Delta_t$ . We then see a jump up in  $\Delta_t$  after passage of the first reform act, consistent with new candidates finding it necessary to begin their careers in more difficult terrain. The Peelite Schism (1847) appears to “reset” the party system insofar as new candidates’ incentives were concerned, and the two parties’ entering cohorts were very similar from 1847 until 1865. Both the second and third reform acts then produce further jumps up in  $\Delta_t$ .

These reform act effects can be explored further by running two-way fixed effects models in a window including the three elections before and after each reform act. The unit of analysis is a new candidate (running for the first time). Our regression specification is as follows:

$$\hat{C}_{it} = \beta_1 P_{it} + \beta_2 T_{it} + \beta_3 P_{it} * T_{it} + \alpha_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

The dependent variable,  $\hat{C}_{it}$ , is the expected Conservative share of the seats in candidate  $i$ 's constituency in election  $t$ . Controlling for constituency and year fixed effects, the main independent variables are  $P$ , a dummy variable indicating Liberals, and  $T$ , a dummy variable indicating the election was after the respective reform. The coefficient on the interaction indicates whether new Liberals tended to differentiate from new Conservatives after each reform act. We expect a positive coefficient, indicating that each party's entering cohort forged into enemy territory more extensively after each reform.

The results in Table 1 show positive jumps at each reform act, with the jump after the third act being statistically significant. Although these results do not admit causal interpretations except under strong assumptions, we think that cumulatively the evidence can be interpreted as follows. After each reform act, party leaders had a relatively high demand for candidates who would contest the other party's seats, and entering cohorts perceived that they would ultimately be rewarded for doing so. Thus, although individual candidates bore most of the (substantial) cost of campaigning (see Kam and Newson 2021), we see a systematic trend toward first-time candidates running increasingly hopeless campaigns. Since the immediate return to these inaugural campaigns was an increasingly good approximation of zero, candidates must have been receiving some other form of compensation for their efforts. The most obvious such compensation would be a promise of securing a more winnable nomination in future.

## 7 Upward trends

What did the change in the distribution of safe seats imply for individual career trajectories? In this section, we investigate whether candidates in fact secured more winnable nominations over the course of their careers, and whether this upward trend stemmed from changing con-

**Table 1: Two-way Fixed Effects Model Estimates.** Estimates show the effect of being a Liberal candidate on the seat value compared to a Conservative candidate.

	1832 Reform Act	1868 Reform Act	1885 Reform Act
Liberal	0.013 (0.036)	0.031 (0.018)	0.050 (0.013)
Liberal * post-Reform	0.013 (0.039)	0.038 (0.023)	0.055 (0.021)
Constituency FEs	Y	Y	Y
Year FEs	Y	Y	Y
Num.Obs.	736	1263	1512
R2	0.710	0.654	0.791

All estimates reported with robust standard errors clustered at the constituency level in parentheses. Each observation is a first-time Conservative or Liberal candidate running in a non-patronal constituency in England, Scotland or Wales in one of the three elections around the respective Reform Act (with 1832 and 1885 excluded due to redistricting and data changes). Liberal is a binary variable set to 1 if the candidate ran for the Liberal party. Post-reform is a binary variable set to 1 if the candidacy occurred in the three elections after the reform act.

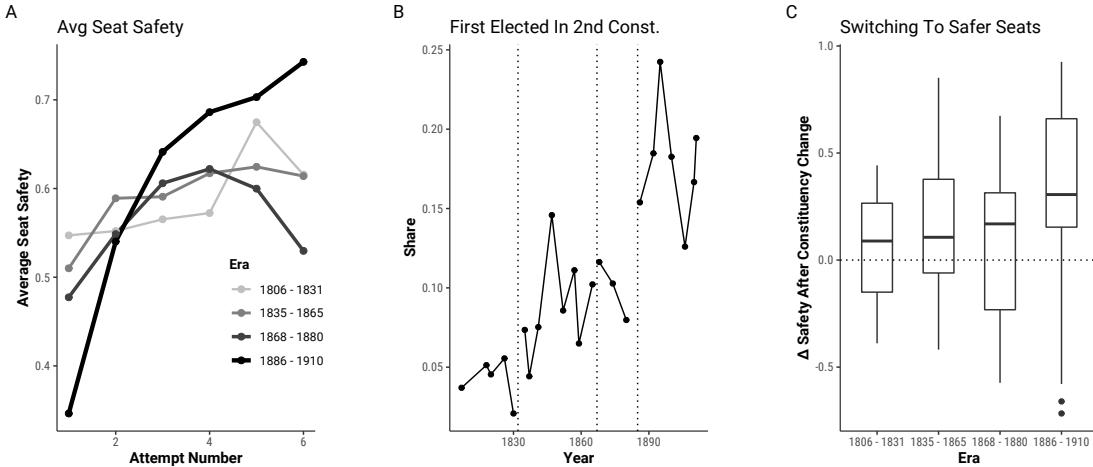
stituencies. To do so, we track candidates' names (post-processing, as described in footnote 7) across the data set and consecutively number their election attempts and constituencies.<sup>17</sup> For each election attempt, we define seat safety as the seat share the candidate's party was expected to win in the constituency they contested. We then compute the average seat safety conditional on election attempt number (separately for each reform era).

Figure 7A shows a clear upward trend in seat safety across election attempts. In each era, candidates improved their seat safety in their later election attempts. Figure 7A also shows that the slope of these upward trends increased strongly in later eras.

What explains the steepening slope? There is no evidence that candidates learned more about campaigning in later eras. If anything, the increasingly party-centered electorate should have meant that candidates could earn smaller and smaller personal votes over their careers. Similarly, there is no evidence that elections increasingly screened for high-quality

---

<sup>17</sup>When candidates' names change over time, we risk labeling established politicians as first-timers. Random checks suggest this problem is minimal but, given that we would expect such candidates to run in safe seats, this problem would attenuate any improvements across election attempts.



**Figure 7: In later eras, candidates improve more in seat safety after multiple contested elections.** Figure 7A shows the average seat safety for Conservative and Liberal candidates by consecutive election attempt and reform era. The following elections were excluded due to missing data associated with redistricting: 1832, 1885. We restrict attention to each candidate’s first six election attempts, as our sample grows too small thereafter. Figure 7B shows the proportion of eventually elected candidates who win their first elections only after switching from their initial constituency. Figure 7C provides a boxplot of how much safer a candidate’s second constituency was than their first, by reform era.

candidates. Again, candidate characteristics should have been declining in importance. What about switching constituencies? Figure 7B shows that, among those who eventually served in the House of Commons, the share who switched constituencies before winning their first term increased substantially after the first and third reform acts. Figure 7C shows that these candidates switched to safer constituencies in all eras but that the median safety increment they enjoyed became slightly larger after the first reform act, and substantially larger after the third.

Thus, the most plausible mechanism behind the steepening slope in Figure 7A was the emergence of a new norm whereby candidates moved to safer constituencies over the course of their careers. Moreover, this result suggests that the pattern of changes in electoral security that we document cannot stem from changes in candidate supply alone.<sup>18</sup> In Appendix E,

<sup>18</sup>For example, if the increase in electoral security were simply due to higher-quality candidates running, we would, contrary to Figure 7, expect candidates in later eras to be more likely to win outright or, at least, less likely to switch constituency before winning office.

we provide further evidence supporting this idea—including two-way fixed-effects models showing that changing constituencies became increasingly likely to boost a candidate’s win probability.

## 8 Career paths within parliament

In the unreformed polity, members sometimes vaulted quickly into the cabinet. Pitt the Younger became Chancellor of the Exchequer a year and a half after his first election (and then Prime Minister a year and a half later, at the age of 24). By the 20th century, however, MPs typically advanced from the back benches to one or more sub-cabinet posts, and thence to a cabinet post (Kam 2009, pp. 190–191): a hierarchy of offices was in place. Moreover, each party used its increasing influence over nominations to give office-holding MPs safe seats, thereby protecting its leaders. In this section, we investigate when an office hierarchy emerged and when office-holders were first favored in the competition for nominations.

### 8.1 The office hierarchy in the House of Commons

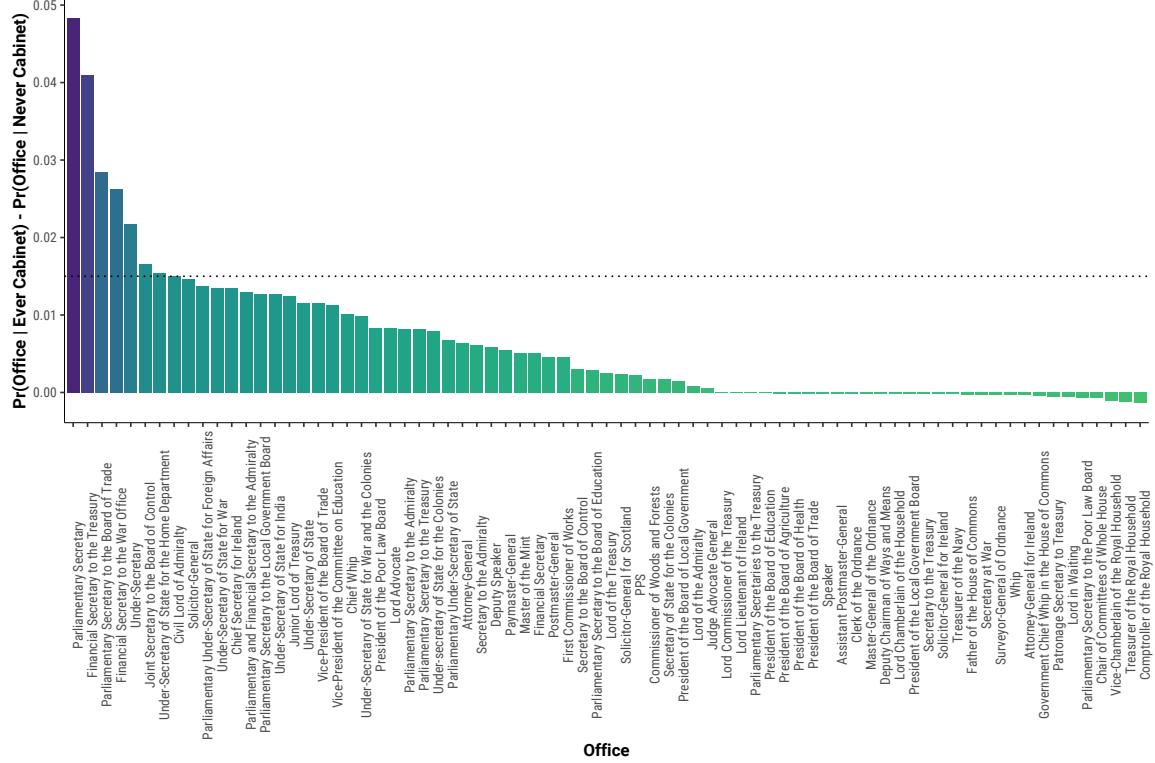
First, we consider the extent to which holding certain offices heralded future promotion into the cabinet. Our data are from Eggers and Spirling (2014), who document MPs’ parliamentary offices in the post-1832 era.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 8 lists all the sub-cabinet offices in the dataset on the horizontal axis, showing for each whether the office was more likely to be held by MPs who eventually served in the cabinet.<sup>20</sup> As can be seen, about half the offices (those listed on the right) are equally likely to be held by ever-cabinet and never-cabinet MPs. We define offices with a difference in

---

<sup>19</sup>Unfortunately, offices are not coded in a uniform way – for example, some under-secretaries are spelled out with their full office titles, while others only include the general type of office.

<sup>20</sup>To do so, we aggregate the data at the level of year-by-office observations and compute the probability that an MP later ascending to Cabinet holds an office, versus the probability that an MP never ascending to Cabinet does. We drop offices with fewer than 5 occupants in the data. We record MPs’ offices until 1929, meaning that new MPs serving towards the tail end of our period of analysis (e.g., 1910) are less vulnerable to truncation concerns.

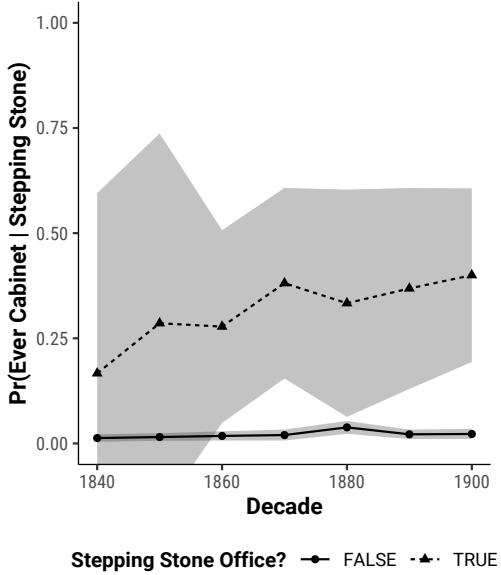


**Figure 8: Which offices were most predictive of future Cabinet positions?** The figure shows sub-cabinet offices recorded in the Eggers-Spirling dataset sorted by whether its holders were more likely to accede to a Cabinet position in the future.

probability greater than 1.5 percentage points as stepping stone offices. As can be seen, parliamentary secretaries and under-secretaries of various sorts are the most common stepping stones.

For all MPs holding a stepping-stone office in a particular decade, the upper curve in Figure 9 shows the proportion who eventually serve in the cabinet. The lower curve gives the proportion of MPs not holding a stepping-stone office who eventually serve in the cabinet. (We drop the 1830s because the Eggers-Spirling dataset only begins to report MPs' offices in 1836.)

Figure 9 demonstrates two main points. First, those not serving in a stepping-stone office rarely reached the cabinet. It appears that a conventional route into the cabinet already existed by the first decade for which we have reasonable data (the 1840s), although there are still too few offices recorded at that time to say so with certainty.

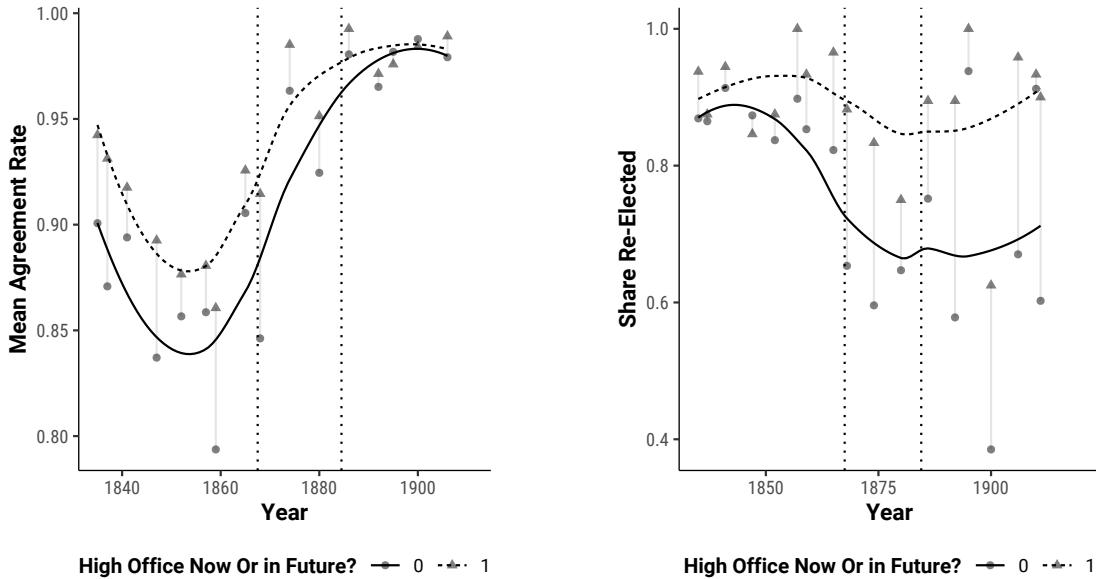


**Figure 9: The probability of attaining a cabinet-rank office, by whether the MP held a stepping-stone office.** Datapoints show MPs’ probability of attaining a Cabinet office position conditional on having held a stepping stone office, by decade. On the horizontal axis, 1840 refers to the decade 1840-49 and similarly for the other years. Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Second, those holding a stepping-stone office were substantially more likely to eventually serve in the cabinet. We also observe an upward trend over time—by the turn of the century, almost 50% of stepping stone office holders go on to serve in the Cabinet. That said, the scarcity of stepping stone offices brings about high uncertainty, as can be seen by the large confidence intervals in the figure.

## 8.2 Nominations, offices, and whip loyalty

Finally, we investigate MPs in the “office pipeline”—i.e., those who either hold a stepping-stone office in the current parliament or will hold a stepping stone or cabinet office in the future. We drop MPs currently serving in the Cabinet, in order to compare those still seeking advancement to those who never secure advancement: did MPs’ rise through the nomination hierarchy precede or coincide with their office trajectory?



**Figure 10: MPs ascending to more senior positions tend to be more loyal and enjoyed higher re-election rates.** The left panel shows the mean cohesion score for all government MPs grouped by whether they will serve in the Cabinet or a stepping stone office in the future or already are in a stepping stone office, versus those never to serve in a high office. The right panel retains the same grouping, but shows the share of MPs running and winning re-election instead. Data restricted to MPs whose party served in government in any given parliamentary term. 1885-6 Parliament excluded from data (due to its short tenure).

**Whip loyalty.** Scholars have been interested in whether party leaders use nomination control to discipline their parliamentary troops since Ostrogorski (1901), Lachapelle (1911), and Schattschneider (1942). The issue has been more recently examined in the British context by Cox (1987), Eggers and Spirling (2014), and Eggers and Spirling (2016).

The left panel of Figure 10 shows that MPs in the office pipeline were 3-5 percentage points more loyal than their backbench colleagues until the third reform act, after which backbenchers and frontbenchers were equally (and highly) loyal. The smoothed (local linear regression) curve somewhat obscures how quickly backbenchers caught up with frontbenchers after the third reform act but the reader can see this by looking at the raw data in the graph.

**Re-election and seat safety.** The right panel of Figure 10 shows that office pipeline MPs became more likely to win re-election, relative to other MPs within the governing party.

While any advantage appears very small in the 1840s, beginning in the 1850s a systematic advantage for office-holders appears and grows sharply after 1868. It appears that the modern “norm” that those on a ministerial career track be nominated in safe districts was established after the Peelite schism ended and matured soon after the second reform act. In Appendix J, we investigate the relationship between seat safety and Cabinet appointment further. We show that MPs who served in Cabinet ran in relatively safe seats prior to their appointment; and that their pre-Cabinet safety was even higher in the post-1885 era. Together, we take this as suggestive evidence that, by the end of the 19th century, successful politicians first climbed a nomination ladder *before* ascending an office ladder.

## 9 Conclusion

The early 19th-century British party system was nothing like the parliamentary system for which the country became famous over the next century. One of the most important differences concerned the parties’ *lack* of control over who could run for election under their labels. Nomination was highly decentralized, with patronal peers—not selected in any way by the parties—choosing party nominees in many constituencies (Sack 1980). While it is well known that the parties’ local and central leaders eventually came to control nominations, no one has systematically analyzed how increasing party control affected members’ careers. In this paper, we consider the processes by which parties extended their control over nominations and test several predictions about how careers changed as a consequence.

We have argued that the parties took over nominations in part because the three reform acts expanded electorates, while redrawing or abolishing constituencies, so that aristocrats could no longer control electoral outcomes. In other words, the reform acts effectively put the parties’ chief competitors, the patronal peers, out of business.

Another important part of the story, however, was that voters became increasingly party-centered over the course of the century. More party-centered voting increased the proportion

of constituencies that were safe for one party or the other. Most of the paper is based on a “property rights” theory of how increasing intra-party competition for safe nominations might have prompted the formation of seniority norms. We provide evidence that, after each reform act, adherence to incumbent re-nomination and seniority progression norms increased. As incumbents and those next in line to become incumbents took the best spots, newcomers were forced to accept increasingly unwinnable initial assignments; and the proportion who won only after switching their initial constituency steadily increased. At the top of the hierarchy, cabinet ministers increasingly received safe nominations; and the path into the cabinet increasingly went through specific stepping-stone offices. After the third reform act, all of these patterns were clearly evident in the relevant statistics.

It is hard to pick out one of the reform acts as most important. All of them reduced the influence of patronal peers and increased party-centered voting, so they can be viewed as three doses of the same medicine. The first reform act was clearly the largest single attack on the patronal peers; and led to the birth both of local party associations and centralized party clearinghouses for nominations in the London clubs. The 1860s and the second reform act stand out as when newcomers first began accepting tough initial assignments and cabinet ministers first began receiving a consistent leg up in the competition for nominations. The third reform act stands out in terms of affecting the distribution of safe districts and when party careerism reached modern levels.

Although we have focused on Great Britain, we should note that the shift in nomination control from local notables to party leaders seems to be a very general phenomenon in parliamentary Europe. This suggests that, in many other European countries, careers should increasingly have been regulated by seniority norms and conventional career paths—at least once the parties had wrested control over the budget and ministerial appointments from the monarch.

## References

- Alchian, Armen A. and Harold Demsetz (1972). “Production, Information Costs, and Economic Organization”. In: *The American economic review* 62.5, pp. 777–795.
- Bailer, Stefanie and Tamaki Ohmura (2018). “Exploring, Maintaining, and Disengaging—The Three Phases of a Legislator’s Life”. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 43.3, pp. 493–520.
- Berlinski, Samuel, Torun Dewan, and Brenda Van Coppenolle (2014). “Franchise Extension and the British Aristocracy”. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 39.4, pp. 531–558.
- Butler, David and Donald Stoke (1971). *Political Change in Britain: Basis of Electoral Choice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Calonico, Sebastian, Matias D. Cattaneo, and Rocio Titiunik (2014). “Robust Nonparametric Confidence Intervals for Regression-Discontinuity Designs”. In: *Econometrica* 82.6, pp. 2295–2326.
- Caughey, Devin and Jasjeet S. Sekhon (2011). “Elections and the Regression Discontinuity Design: Lessons from Close US House Races, 1942–2008”. In: *Political Analysis* 19.4, pp. 385–408.
- Cirone, Alexandra, Gary W. Cox, and Jon H. Fiva (2020). “Seniority-Based Nominations and Political Careers”. In: *American Political Science Review*, pp. 1–18.
- Coats, R. Morris and Thomas R. Dalton (1992). “A Note on the Cost of Standing for the British Parliament: 1852–1880”. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, pp. 585–593.
- Cox, Gary W. (1987). *The Efficient Secret*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1992). “The Origins of Whip Votes in the House of Commons”. In: *Parliamentary History* 11.2, pp. 278–85.
- Dahlgaard, Jens Olav (2016). “You Just Made It: Individual Incumbency Advantage under Proportional Representation”. In: *Electoral Studies* 44, pp. 319–328.
- De Magalhaes, Leandro (2015). “Incumbency Effects in a Comparative Perspective: Evidence from Brazilian Mayoral Elections”. In: *Political Analysis*, pp. 113–126.

- Eggers, Andrew C., Anthony Fowler, et al. (2015). "On the Validity of the Regression Discontinuity Design for Estimating Electoral Effects: New Evidence from over 40,000 Close Races". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 59.1, pp. 259–274.
- Eggers, Andrew C. and Arthur Spirling (2014). "Ministerial Responsiveness in Westminster Systems: Institutional Choices and House of Commons Debate, 1832–1915". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 58.4, pp. 873–887.
- (2016). "Party Cohesion in Westminster Systems: Inducements, Replacement and Discipline in the House of Commons, 1836–1910". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 46.3, p. 567.
- Epstein, David et al. (1997). "A Comparative Approach to Legislative Organization: Careerism and Seniority in the United States and Japan". In: *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 965–998.
- Fresh, Adriane (2020). "Industrial Revolution and Political Change: Evidence from the British Isles." Unpublished Typescript. Unpublished Typescript. Duke University.
- Gash, Norman (1977). *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation, 1830–1850*. Hassocks, Sussex, UK: Harvester Press.
- Hanham, Harold John (1959). *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Company.
- Hawkins, Angus (1998). *British Party Politics, 1852–1886*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Hill, Brian W. (1985). *British Parliamentary Parties, 1742–1832: From the Fall of Walpole to the First Reform Act*. Allen & Unwin London.
- Høyland, Bjørn, Sara Hobolt, and Simon Hix (2019). "Career Ambitions and Legislative Participation: The Moderating Effect of Electoral Institutions". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 49.2, pp. 491–512.
- Hyttinen, Ari et al. (2018). "When Does Regression Discontinuity Design Work? Evidence from Random Election Outcomes". In: *Quantitative Economics* 9.2, pp. 1019–1051.

- Jenkins, Jeffery A. (1998). "Property Rights and the Emergence of Standing Committee Dominance in the Nineteenth-Century House". In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, pp. 493–519.
- Kam, Christopher (2009). *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kam, Christopher and Adlai Newson (2021). *The Economic Origin of Political Parties*. Elements in Political Economy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lachapelle, Georges (1911). *La Représentation Proportionnelle En France et En Belgique*. F. Alcan.
- Lloyd, Trevor (1965). "Uncontested Seats in British General Elections, 1852-1910". In: *The Historical Journal* 8.2, pp. 260–265.
- Lowell, Abbott Lawrence (1902). *The Influence of Party upon Legislation in England and America*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- McKelvey, R. and Raymond Riezman (1993). "Initial versus Continuing Proposal Power in Legislative Seniority Systems". In: *Political Economy: Institutions, Competition, and Representation*, pp. 279–292.
- Muthoo, Abhinay and Kenneth A. Shepsle (2014). "Seniority and Incumbency in Legislatures". In: *Economics & Politics* 26.1, pp. 13–37.
- North, Douglass C. and Barry R. Weingast (1989). "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England". In: *The journal of economic history* 49.4, pp. 803–832.
- Ostrogorski, M. La (1901). *Democratic et l'organisation Des Partis Politiques. 2 Vol., 2e Edit.* P.
- Ranney, Austin (1965). *Pathways to Parliament: Candidate Selection in Britain*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Riker, William H. and Itai Sened (1991). "A Political Theory of the Origin of Property Rights: Airport Slots". In: *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 951–969.

- Rohde, David W. (1979). "Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives". In: *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 1–26.
- Sack, James J. (1980). "The House of Lords and Parliamentary Patronage in Great Britain, 1802-1832". In: *The Historical Journal* 23.4, pp. 913–937.
- Sainty, John and Gary W. Cox (1997). "The Identification of Government Whips in the House of Commons, 1830-1905". In: *Parliamentary History* 16.3, p. 339.
- Schattschneider, Elmer Eric (1942). "Political Parties". In: *New York: Holt, Riehart, and Winston*.
- Schlesinger, Joseph A. (1966). *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*. Rand MacNally.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Barry R. Weingast (1984). "Political Solutions to Market Problems". In: *American Political Science Review* 78.2, pp. 417–434.
- Smith, Henry Stooks (1973). *The Parliaments of England, from 1715 to 1847*. Political Reference Publications.
- Sugden, Robert (1986). *The Economics of Rights, Co-Operation and Welfare*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Thevoz, Seth Alexander (2018). *Club Government: How the Early Victorian World Was Ruled from London Clubs*. London, UK: I.B. Tauris.
- Thompson, A. F. (1948). "Gladstone's Whips and the General Election of 1868". In: *The English Historical Review* 63.247, pp. 189–200.
- Van Coppenolle, Brenda (2017). "Political Dynasties in the UK House of Commons: The Null Effect of Narrow Electoral Selection". In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 42.3, pp. 449–475.
- Walter, Ralph (2018). "British Parliamentary By-Elections during the First World War, 1914–18". In: *Parliamentary History* 37.3, pp. 415–434.

# Appendix

For online publication only.

## Table of Contents

---

<b>A Descriptive Statistics</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>B Measuring <math>\hat{C}_{ct}</math></b>	<b>34</b>
<b>C Patronal constituencies</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>D Double Candidacies</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>E Within-Career Changes</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>F Regression Discontinuity: Formal Estimates</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>G Regression Discontinuity: Year-by-year Regressions</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>H Regression Discontinuity: Sorting Around Threshold</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>I Regression Discontinuity: Polynomial Robustness</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>J Seat Safety and Cabinet Appointment</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>K Partisan Voting and Single-Member Districts</b>	<b>47</b>
K.1 Simulating District Splits . . . . .	47
K.2 Assessing Non-Split Districts . . . . .	48

---

## A Descriptive Statistics

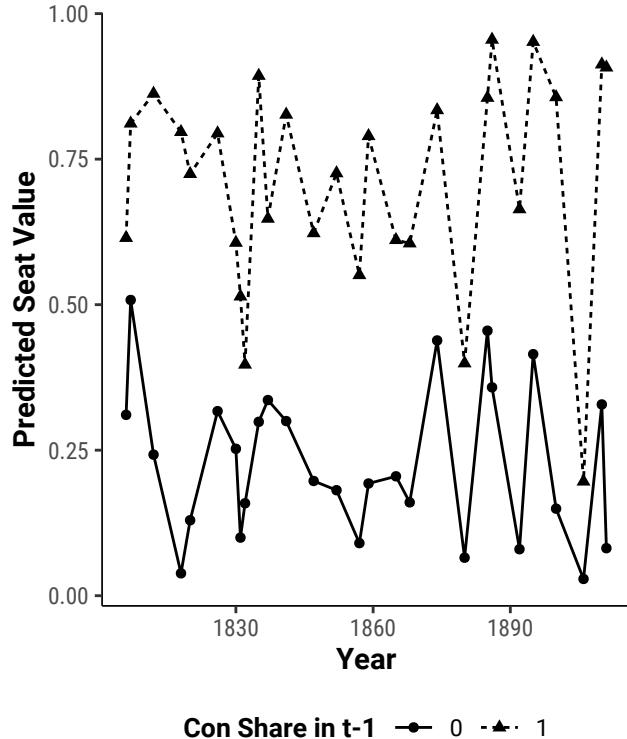
First, we report some descriptive statistics on the number of candidates and the share of successful candidates, by party and year, in Table 2. As before, the election of December 1910 is coded as 1911. We exclude candidacies in Ireland, in patronal constituencies, and candidates who ever switched between the two main parties.

**Table 2: Number of candidates by year and party.** Cand (Opp) refers to the number of candidates in contested constituencies. Share Win is the share of successful candidacies in contested constituencies. Cand (Unopp) refers to the number of candidacies that were not opposed by other candidates.

Year	Conservative			Liberal		
	# Cand (Opp)	Share Win	# Cand (Unopp)	# Cand (Opp)	Share Win	# Cand (Unopp)
1802	38	0.58	39	38	0.63	17
1806	40	0.58	32	30	0.73	30
1807	40	0.80	42	39	0.44	19
1812	30	0.73	51	23	0.57	24
1818	41	0.61	50	44	0.66	21
1820	24	0.62	56	36	0.81	32
1826	56	0.61	49	40	0.55	29
1830	57	0.63	41	44	0.73	33
1831	41	0.59	34	36	0.69	52
1832	172	0.31	27	332	0.64	70
1835	180	0.56	57	235	0.57	78
1837	221	0.56	54	255	0.56	50
1841	184	0.51	115	192	0.57	54
1847	132	0.53	116	184	0.59	80
1852	194	0.60	92	231	0.56	48
1857	130	0.49	90	195	0.66	96
1859	133	0.50	108	182	0.62	93
1865	184	0.55	77	215	0.60	85
1868	253	0.51	42	305	0.58	55
1874	270	0.59	87	264	0.47	26
1880	321	0.39	41	267	0.69	19
1885	464	0.44	6	357	0.50	7
1886	306	0.68	82	333	0.36	29
1892	414	0.51	24	406	0.49	11
1895	354	0.62	94	344	0.38	9
1900	328	0.59	121	292	0.43	23
1906	465	0.25	2	399	0.74	17
1910	494	0.43	7	413	0.55	NA
1911	409	0.41	49	350	0.57	26
1918	338	0.86	28	338	0.30	19

## B Measuring $\hat{C}_{ct}$

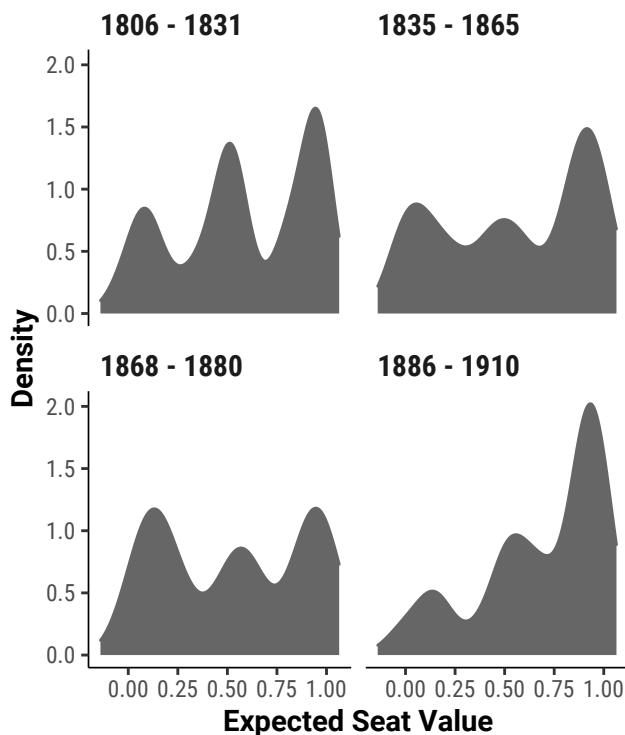
In this section, we summarize the predicted (two-party) Conservative seat share ( $\hat{C}_t$ ) in each election year  $t$  for a fully contested constituency that had no Conservatives elected in  $t - 1$  versus one that had only Conservatives elected. Figure 11 plots these predicted shares over time.



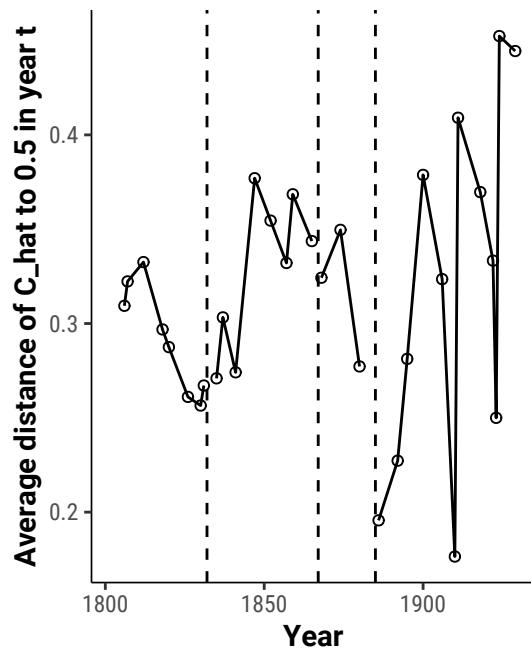
**Figure 11:** Predicted Conservative Seat Share for Constituencies With Conservative Seat Share 0 or 1 in Previous Election

## C Patronal constituencies

In this appendix, we briefly show that the patronal constituencies behaved differently than the partisan constituencies in several ways. First, the patronal constituencies do not separate into safe Liberal and safe Conservative categories as quickly or as clearly as the partisan constituencies. This can be seen in Figures 12 and 13. Second, MPs beginning in patronal constituencies, especially Conservatives, did not show as large a decline in their chance of winning as their colleagues starting in partisan constituencies (see Figure ??). This suggests that Conservative peers were allowing their favorites get into parliament without having first to prove their mettle by contesting unwinnable constituencies.



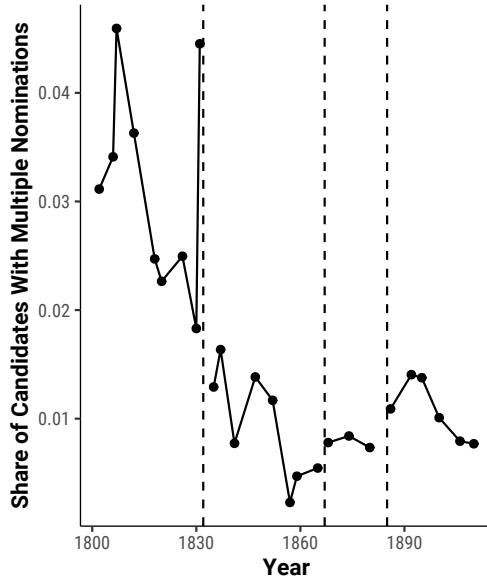
**Figure 12: Patronal constituencies did not become more bimodal.** This figure shows the distribution of predicted Conservative seat shares among patronal constituencies, by reform era. Unlike the non-patronal constituencies, the distribution did not become markedly more bimodal over time.



**Figure 13: Patronal constituencies did not become more safe.** This figure shows the average distance between constituencies' predicted Conservative seat share and an equal split (0.5). Unlike the non-patronal constituencies, seats did not become safer on average.

## D Double Candidacies

In this section, we report the share candidates (identified by name) that ran in more than one constituency in any given election. Figure 14 plots the share by election year. There is a marked and continued decrease in the share of candidates with multiple nominations throughout most of the 19th century.



**Figure 14:** Very few candidates ran in with multiple nominations in the same election.

## E Within-Career Changes

In this section, we present additional analyses in support of the mechanism argued for in section 7.

To measure the relationship between constituency switches and candidates' probability to win, we fit regressions of the form

$$y_{it} = \text{Attempt}_{it} + CN_{it} + \phi_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

where  $y_{it}$  is the candidate's expected seat safety in year  $t$ ,  $\text{Attempt}$  denotes a candidate's election attempt,  $CN$  denotes the number of different constituencies he has run in so far,  $\phi_i$  denotes candidate fixed effects and  $\delta_t$  denotes year fixed effects.

Table 3 reports the estimates from these specifications. In Column (1), we report a simple OLS regression on the number of attempts running and the number of different constituencies that the candidate contested until time  $t$ . Because this simple regression may be confounded, we include candidate- and year-fixed effects in Column 2. Finally, in Column 3, we break out the relationship by era by interacting both  $\text{Attempt}$  and  $CN$  with an era dummy.

The results from the more credible specifications (Column 2 and 3) suggest that, controlling for the number of times a candidate ran, a switch to a new constituency was associated with an increase in their probability of being elected. Looking further at Column 3, this relationship commenced after the first reform act and gradually strengthened over time.

**Table 3: Candidates who switched constituencies became more likely to win**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Attempt	0.103 (0.003)	0.058 (0.008)	
Constituency No.	-0.085 (0.010)	0.188 (0.017)	
Attempt (1806-1831)			0.045 (0.033)
Attempt (1835-1865)			0.089 (0.009)
Attempt (1868-1880)			0.020 (0.013)
Attempt (1886-1910)			0.036 (0.017)
Const No. (1806-1831)			0.015 (0.127)
Const No. (1835-1865)			0.111 (0.028)
Const No. (1868-1880)			0.163 (0.030)
Const No. (1886-1910)			0.244 (0.021)
N	10655	10655	10655
R2	0.10	0.68	0.68
Cand FE		X	X
Year FE		X	X
Candidates	5520	5520	5520
Years	26	26	26

Robust standard errors clustered by candidate in parentheses. Each observation is a Conservative or Liberal candidate running in a non-patronal constituency in England, Scotland, or Wales between 1802 and 1911.

## F Regression Discontinuity: Formal Estimates

Below, we report the formal estimates for each regression discontinuity plotted in Figure ??, along with the optimal bandwidth selected according to Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014), and the number of observations.

**Table 4:** Regression Discontinuity Estimates.

Outcome	Interval	Estimate	SE	N	BW
Running in t+1	1802 - 1820	0.04	0.14	342	0.11
Running in t+1	1806 - 1826	0.12	0.15	356	0.10
Running in t+1	1832 - 1852	0.04	0.06	2282	0.06
Running in t+1	1835 - 1857	0.07	0.06	2111	0.06
Running in t+1	1837 - 1859	0.06	0.06	2022	0.06
Running in t+1	1841 - 1865	0.10	0.06	1964	0.07
Running in t+1	1847 - 1868	0.12	0.06	2132	0.06
Running in t+1	1885 - 1906	0.23	0.05	3767	0.07
Running in t+1	1886 - 1910	0.20	0.05	3908	0.07
Running in t+1	1892 - 1911	0.17	0.05	4041	0.05
Running in t+1	1895 - 1918	0.18	0.05	3728	0.05
Running in t+1	1900 - 1922	0.16	0.06	3526	0.05
Running in t+1	1906 - 1923	0.20	0.05	3522	0.06
Winning in t+1	1802 - 1820	-0.17	0.14	342	0.10
Winning in t+1	1806 - 1826	-0.09	0.15	356	0.10
Winning in t+1	1832 - 1852	0.07	0.05	2282	0.06
Winning in t+1	1835 - 1857	0.11	0.05	2111	0.07
Winning in t+1	1837 - 1859	0.07	0.05	2022	0.07
Winning in t+1	1841 - 1865	0.09	0.05	1964	0.07
Winning in t+1	1847 - 1868	0.09	0.05	2132	0.07
Winning in t+1	1885 - 1906	0.16	0.05	3767	0.06
Winning in t+1	1886 - 1910	0.14	0.05	3908	0.05
Winning in t+1	1892 - 1911	0.09	0.05	4041	0.04
Winning in t+1	1895 - 1918	0.16	0.05	3728	0.05
Winning in t+1	1900 - 1922	0.12	0.05	3526	0.05
Winning in t+1	1906 - 1923	0.19	0.05	3522	0.07

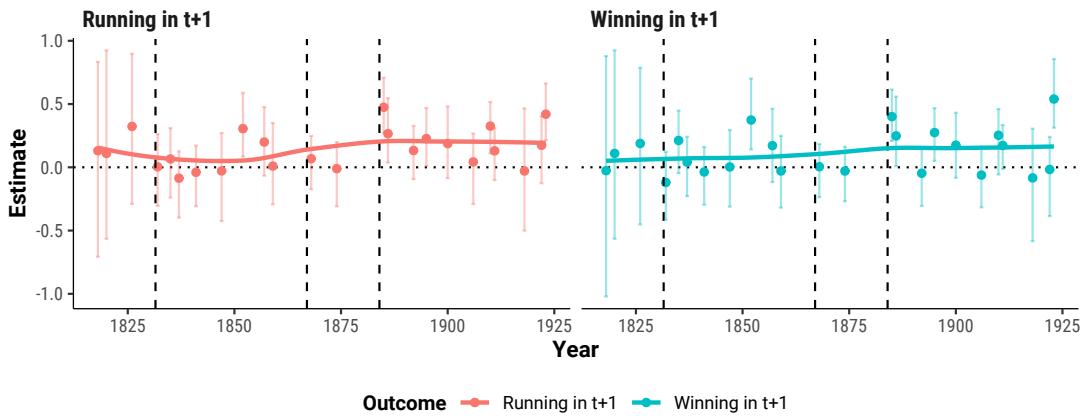
All estimates are with robust standard errors. The estimates report the effect of barely winning the election at the threshold on the reported outcome.

## G Regression Discontinuity: Year-by-year Regressions

Below, we show the results for our regression discontinuity estimated on data from separate years, rather than moving windows spanning multiple elections. The results are much noisier, but show an upward trend over time, in line with our ‘moving window’ estimates. We omit very early years where, due to the low number of competitive elections, no reasonable estimate of the effect at the threshold can be made.

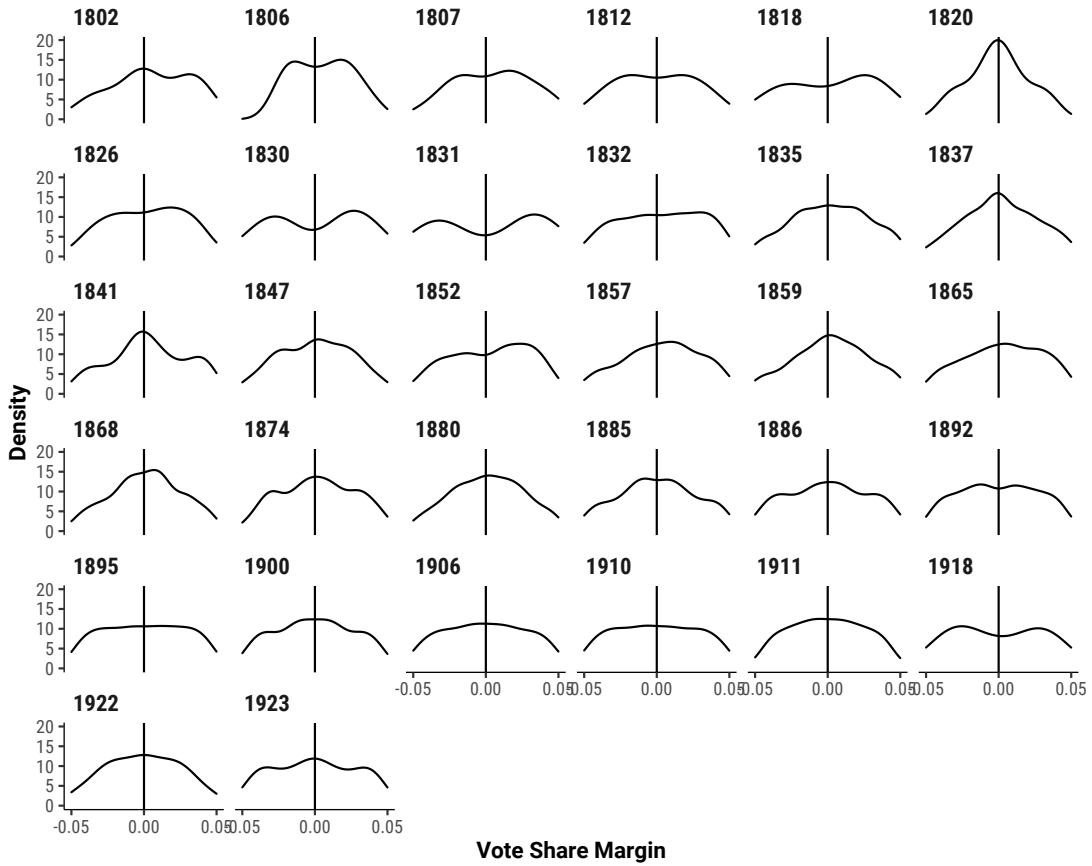
**Table 5: RD Estimates Fitted On Each Election Year Separately.** With Robust Standard Errors.

Year	Running Again		Winning	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
1818	0.13	0.39	-0.03	0.48
1820	0.11	0.38	0.11	0.38
1826	0.32	0.30	0.19	0.32
1832	0.00	0.14	-0.12	0.14
1835	0.07	0.14	0.21	0.13
1837	-0.09	0.13	0.04	0.12
1841	-0.04	0.12	-0.04	0.12
1847	-0.03	0.18	0.00	0.15
1852	0.31	0.13	0.37	0.14
1857	0.20	0.14	0.17	0.15
1859	0.01	0.16	-0.03	0.14
1868	0.07	0.11	0.00	0.11
1874	-0.01	0.13	-0.03	0.11
1885	0.47	0.11	0.40	0.10
1886	0.27	0.13	0.25	0.14
1892	0.13	0.11	-0.05	0.11
1895	0.23	0.12	0.27	0.11
1900	0.19	0.14	0.17	0.13
1906	0.04	0.14	-0.06	0.12
1910	0.33	0.10	0.25	0.13
1911	0.13	0.10	0.17	0.09
1918	-0.03	0.25	-0.08	0.23
1922	0.17	0.13	-0.02	0.16
1923	0.42	0.11	0.54	0.14



**Figure 15: Regression Discontinuity Estimates Fitted On Each Election Separately.** The points indicate the coefficient estimate for the regression discontinuity fitted to each election separately, along with 95% robust confidence intervals. Slope indicates line of best fit over time.

## H Regression Discontinuity: Sorting Around Threshold



**Figure 16: No Evidence Of Candidates Sorting Around Threshold.** Each facet displays the density of observations for a given voteshare (relative to the winning margin).

## I Regression Discontinuity: Polynomial Robustness

We replicate Figure 5 but fit second-order (rather than first-order) polynomials on either side of the winning threshold. The results are in Figure 17. This suggests that our results for the effect of running in  $t + 1$  are robust to the specification of the polynomial. The results for winning in  $t + 1$  look similar but are noisier and only become statistically significant in the last RD window.

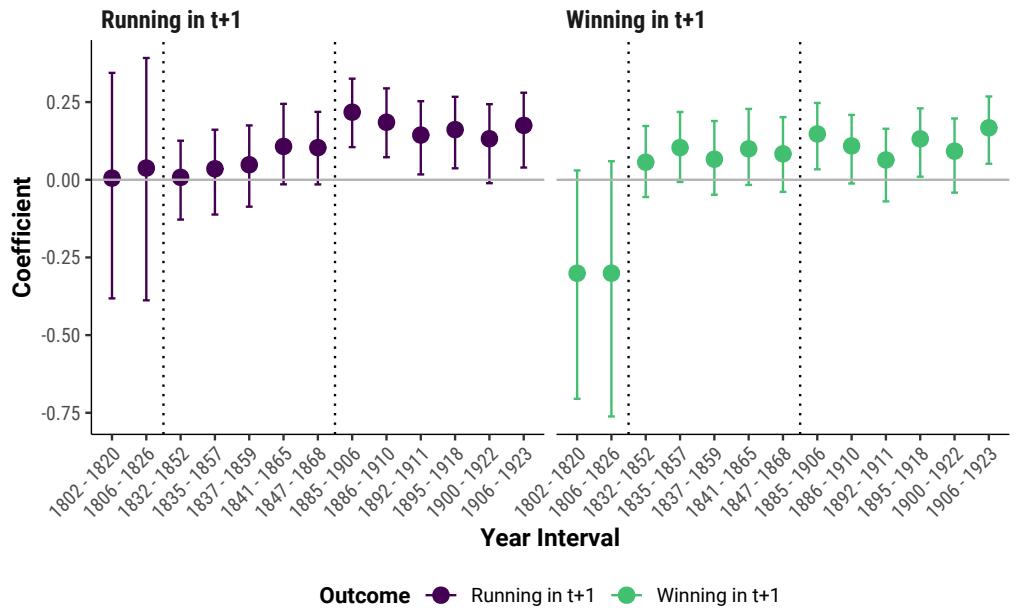
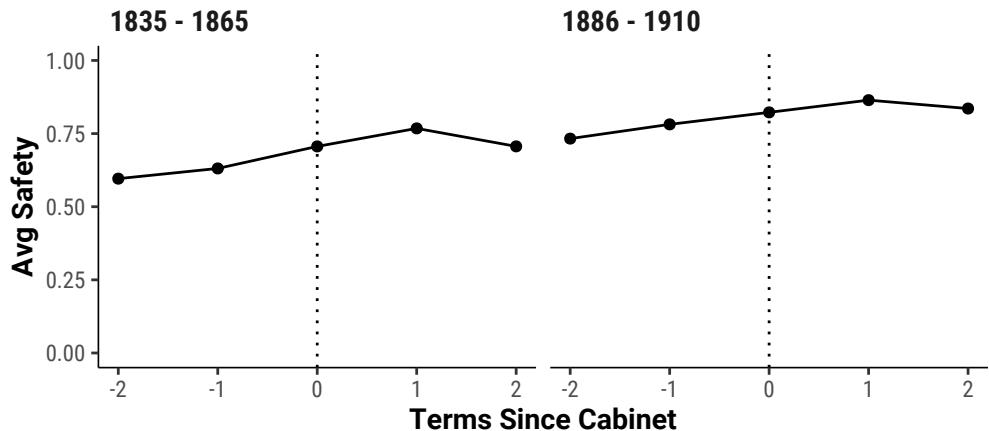


Figure 17: Regression Discontinuity Estimates with Second-Order Polynomial Terms

## J Seat Safety and Cabinet Appointment

In this section, we examine the relationship between MPs' seat safety and appointment to the Cabinet in greater detail. We restrict our attention to those MPs who ever served in Cabinet and focus on their terms in office shortly before and after their first appointment. To avoid distorting the picture by between-era changes in seat safety (and redistricting), we also restrict the analysis to MPs' terms in the same era as their first Cabinet appointment.

Figure 18 plots MPs' seat safety relative to their Cabinet appointment (Note that, in order to assess the unconditional picture, we retain MPs who started or finished their parliamentary tenure within the 2-term window). We see that MPs experience an upward trend throughout their career, with no additional increase in seat safety at the time of appointment to the Cabinet.



**Figure 18: MPs served in safe seats even prior to Cabinet appointment.** The figure shows MPs' average seat safety relative to their first appointment to Cabinet, by era. We exclude the middle era (1868 - 1880) because of the small number of observations.

## K Partisan Voting and Single-Member Districts

In Figure 2, we show that districts became more reliably partisan over time. This change is especially notable after the third reform act. However, at the same time, most two-member constituencies were split into single-member districts. In this Appendix we provide additional evidence that the increase in safe seats is unlikely to be the result of the change in electoral systems alone.

### K.1 Simulating District Splits

To address this concern, we set up a simulation that splits districts into smaller districts with varying degrees of sorting. We repeat the following procedure 200 times for different levels of partisan sorting:

1. For each district  $d$  of 100 original districts, draw the partisan score  $p_d$  from a standard uniform;
2. Within each district, generate 100 voters, each with probability  $p_d$  of being A-partisan, and  $(1 - p_d)$  of being B-partisan;
3. Split each district into two subdistricts by the following rule. For each voter, assign them to the first subdistrict with probability

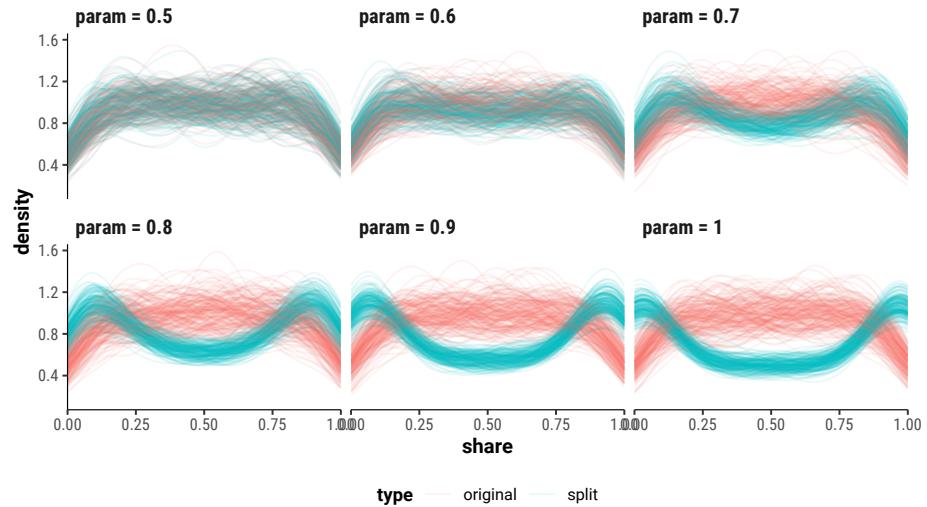
$$1(PartyA) * \alpha + (1 - 1(PartyA)) * (1 - \alpha)$$

where  $1(PartyA)$  is an indicator function whether the voter is A-partisan, and  $\alpha \in [0.5, 1]$  is the sorting parameter. If either subdistrict reaches 50 voters, stop the procedure and assign the remainder to the other subdistrict.

When  $\alpha = 0.5$ , the split is random (and should, in expectation, replicate the partisan lean of the original district). When  $\alpha = 1$ , the split introduces the maximum partisan difference between the two subdistricts.

In Figure 19, we plot the distribution of the partisan lean of the original districts, as well as the split districts. We see that as we increase the sorting parameter, the distribution of subdistricts becomes increasingly bimodal. If districts were split at random, however, no bimodalization occurs.

Our simulations support two main points. First, converting from 2- to 1-seat districts does not necessarily produce bimodalization. Second, when bimodalization does coincide with a reduction in district magnitudes, this is likely the product of (i) partisan splitting of districts; (ii) increases in party voting; and (iii) increases in cooperation between co-partisan candidates. These are all factors consistent with our general analysis, in that they involve party leaders controlling (re)districting (point (i)) or encouraging greater electoral teamwork (point (iii)) or voters becoming more partisan (point (ii)).



**Figure 19:** Bimodalization of expected shares only under additional assumption of sorting

## K.2 Assessing Non-Split Districts

In addition, we also assess the predicted seat share (that is, the  $\hat{C}$  from the regression in the main text) of the 27 two-seat constituencies that remained as such after the third reform act.

Figure 20 shows that these constituencies also moved towards safer partisan leans over time. Although this is a limited set of constituencies, the pattern suggests that the development towards safe seats occurred even when district magnitudes were left unchanged.

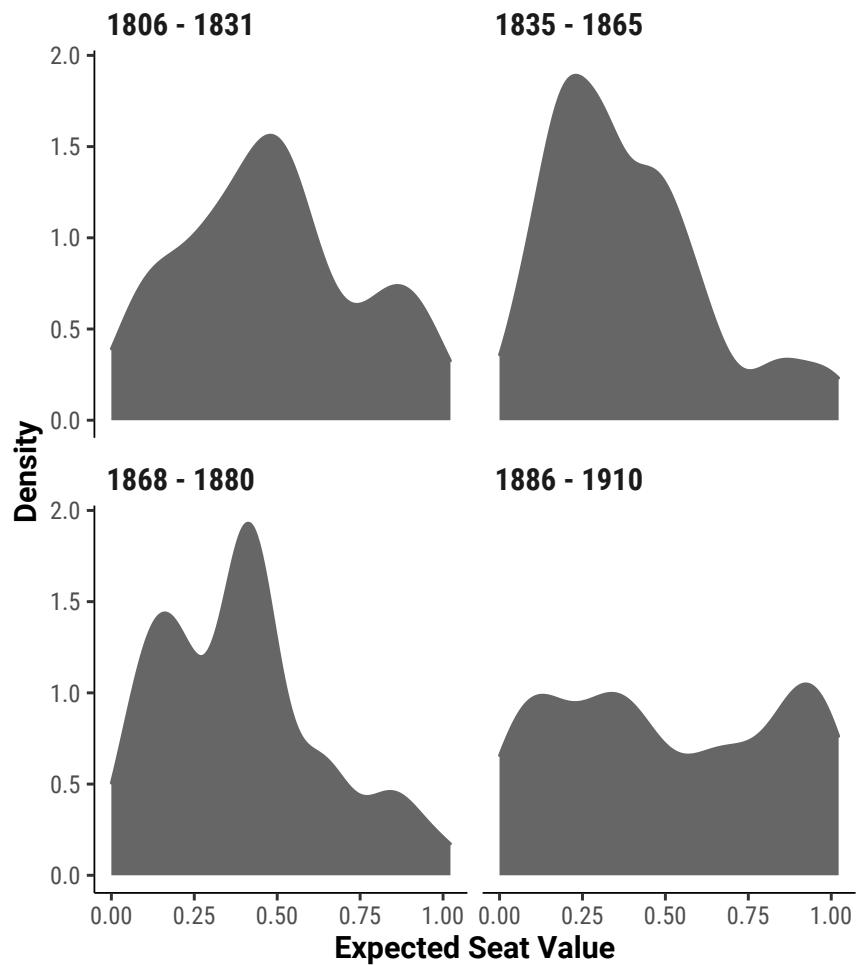


Figure 20: Two-seat districts also became more bimodal over time