The Revolution That Began the Evolution
By Michael Belinsky
Dartmouth College

Democratization does not follow a single path, and is unlikely to have universally applicable necessary and sufficient conditions ... The next round of research and theory in democratization required identification, verification, and connection of the relevant causal mechanisms.
- Charles Tilly

Introduction
The Parliamentary elites’ successful rejection of democratic challenges during the English Revolution (1640-1660) contributed to the formation of a political consensus around petitioning Parliament as the means of democratic reform. In contrast, the success of the democrats outside of the parliamentary structure during the French Revolution ensured the weakness of future Parliaments in confronting democratic agendas. As the parliamentary consensus strengthened, parliamentary groups took over extra-parliamentary groups as the main advocate of democratic reform.

Methodology
Proving the causal link between elites’ actions and the formation of a parliamentary consensus requires useful measures of elites’ actions and parliamentary consensus. The story of elites—that is, powerful politicians like Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton—defending Parliament from most democratic demands outlines the independent variable. The dependent variable of parliamentary consensus—that is, democratization by petitioning Parliament rather than by advocating regime change—is quantified by examining the role of extra-parliamentary groups in democratization after the English Revolution.

Extra-parliamentary groups, political organizations outside of Parliament, occupy the political space between parliamentary parties and civil society. Unlike parties, extra-parliamentary groups by definition have no direct representation in Parliament. Civil society encompasses citizens who actively participate in politics, whether through political clubs, voting, petitioning, or other means. Civil society holds opinions on a variety of issues. Extra-parliamentary groups, in contrast, are more structured and advocate a specific opinion on a specific issue or a small set of issues. Party strength also measures parliamentary consensus, but parties stand secondary to extra-parliamentary groups in indicating consensus. Parties are strong only to the extent that the people view Parliament as legitimate. Meanwhile, Parliament has

2 “Democratization” in this essay means “a movement toward broad citizenship, equal citizenship, binding consultation of citizens, and protection of citizens from arbitrary state action.” (Tilly, p. 1.)

The decreasing participation, or decreasing efficacy, of extra-parliamentary groups affirms the hypothesis of the formation of political consensus around Parliament. If most reforms occur through Parliament without the help of extra-parliamentary groups, then an obvious parliamentary consensus exists. The finding of strong participation and efficacy, however, does not negate the hypothesis. Instead, the means by which an extra-parliamentary group advocates its platform determines the progress of the parliamentary consensus. When a group threatens regime change or revolution, or petitions bodies other than Parliament, this speaks against parliamentary consensus. When a group lobbies Parliament (through petitions, dinners, debates, etc.) or otherwise seeks reform through Parliament, this evidence supports the hypothesis.

What amount of parliamentary petitioning would be necessary to prove the hypothesis, and what amount of non-parliamentary action would disprove it? If extra-parliamentary groups persistently rely on non-parliamentary means to shape democratic reform, then no existence of a parliamentary consensus can be proven. This paper can make a case for parliamentary consensus only if extra-parliamentary groups’ reliance on non-parliamentary means decreases over time, or if extra-parliamentary groups stand secondary to civil society and Parliament in shaping democratic reform.

Is the measurement of parliamentary consensus robust to environmental changes? The hypothesis operates in a dynamic political environment; who elects, who gets elected, and how elections happen all change over time. The power of the state grows, as does civil society. For example, Parliament learns to meet peoples’ demands and channel their discontent into petitions, commissions, and the vote. Comparing the English revolution to a similar event controls for many, but not all, environmental changes.

The comparison of the English and French revolutions illuminates other factors that may have contributed to the formation of a parliamentary consensus. Since no consensus was formed after the French Revolution, whatever characteristics the two revolutions share can be ruled out as sufficient causal agents (assuming similar causes cannot lead to different outcomes). Shared characteristics can, however, be necessary conditions. In order to disprove their role in shaping the parliamentary consensus, the English Revolution would have to be compared to other revolutions where a parliamentary consensus was formed in the absence of the given characteristics. The analysis here will extend only to the English and French revolutions, thus allowing that some factors that these revolutions share may be necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the formation of a parliamentary consensus.

Any factor unique to the English Revolution (e.g., the presence and makeup of the New Model Army) may explain the formation of parliamentary consensus better than the elites’ rejection of democratic demands. Unique aspects of the French revolutionary experience (e.g., the external threat of a Prussian invasion) similarly may have caused, and certainly may have contributed to, the revolution’s different outcome.\footnote{Christopher Hill points out that the ability of the French in 1789 to look back on the English Revolution of 1640 presents another problem when comparing the two revolutions. The presence of that event in French history may have altered the actions of the French during the French Revolution. (Christopher Hill, \textit{The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 2-3.)} A comparison to other revolutions where similar, and similarly unique, events did not lead to similar outcomes would help disprove such claims.
The hypothesized effect of the elites’ rejection of democratic demands on the democratization process suggests that strong elites helped institutionalize democratization by channeling it through Parliament. The grasp of this essay extends only to Britain’s parliamentary consensus, and the above conclusion reaches far beyond that. Different histories of elites’ success and failure in standing up to democratic demands have to be analyzed before the positive effect of channeling democratization can be proven.

The English Revolution

Parliamentary elites successfully rejected democratic challenges during the English Revolution. The Levellers were the most influential of the extra-parliamentary groups to enter the political chaos created by the first English Civil War in 1642. After the Parliamentarians triumphed over King Charles I on the battlefield, the Levellers saw that settlement was failing to progress and proposed a set of democratic reforms. The Parliamentarians, in turn, responded to the Levellers with their own reforms.

The Parliamentarians and the Levellers presented their claims during a set of debates in an attempt to settle the growing discontent within Cromwell’s New Model Army over the Parliamentarians’ inability to settle with the King. These debates, which came to be known as the Putney debates, started in October 1647 at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Putney, and lasted throughout November. The two parties compromised and elected a new, initially biennial, Parliament. Emboldened by their progress, the Levellers pressed for more gains, but they would get no further. Henry Ireton, a general in the army of Parliament and Cromwell’s ally, spoke for the Parliamentarians and strongly disagreed with the Levellers’ franchise requirement. (The Levellers argued that lack of property ownership should not restrict the right to vote.) Ireton stated that non-landowners have no vested interest in the state. Meanwhile, Cromwell began to fear growing radicalism within the Army. He ended the Putney debates and purged the Army ranks of all Agitators. Unable to push for reform by compromising with the elites, the Levellers rallied public discontent against them. They called for the elimination of Army power and the abolition of Parliament, while also attempting to create rifts between Parliament and the New Model Army. After Putney, the Levellers contended that political reform could not be realized through Parliament. The possibility of influencing policy, however, died with the restoration of elite control over the Army.

Levellers’ suggestion to extend democracy, however radical, lay within the capitalist notions of property ownership. A branch of the Levellers known as the True Levellers went far beyond capitalism, calling for the abolition of private property and the creation of egalitarian communes. The True Levellers were labeled “the Diggers” by their opponents for their extra-parliamentary solutions to the political crisis. By the 1640s, enclosure—a process by which arable farming in communal fields was ended by entitlements that made common land private—

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6 The Agreement of the People states the Levellers’ reforms. The Head of the Proposals states the Parliamentarians’ reforms.
8 In The Case of the Army Truly Stated, the Levellers alienated the General Council presiding over the Putney debates, Parliament and elites like Cromwell, Ireton and Fairfax. The Levellers never called for the abolition of Parliament as an institution, but their reforms were anathema to the standing Parliament: 1) purge the present Parliament, 2) allow all free men over 21 to elect a new Parliament. These claims sound less radical now, but in the 1640s they were anti-parliamentarian. (Woolrych, pp. 384-385.)
9 Frank, pp. 136-137.
10 Ibid.
11 Frank, pp. 135-137. The Humble Petition (Sept. 13, 1648), for example, had 400,000 signatories (pp. 167-168).
12 Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, p. 87.
left about one third of England as “barren waste, which the lords of manors would not permit the poor to cultivate.”  

The Diggers established collective communities on those wastelands and started cultivating the land for their benefit (hence their name). Their intentions never escalated to the level of open resistance against Parliament, but their focus on the poor was antithetical to parliamentary solutions. The Diggers demanded that church, crown, and royalist land be handed over to the poor, which directly contradicted previous acts of Parliament. Parliament responded unsympathetically to the Diggers: “The squatters’ shacks were pulled down, their crops destroyed, and the men convicted of trespass and fined … the colony survived into the spring of 1650.” Thus, extra-parliamentary attempts of the Diggers failed against the legal and military pressures enacted by the Parliament.

Other groups also presented solutions to the political crisis of the mid-17th century. The pacifist Quakers railed against the established Church and called for annual Parliaments. The millenarian Fifth Monarchists sought to reform Parliament for the second coming of Christ. The Ranters, a radical branch of the Quakers (just as the Diggers were a radical branch of the Levellers), started a quest to deconstruct hierarchies by flaunting societal taboos, parading naked on the streets of London.

None of the groups successfully implemented its demands outside of the parliamentary structure. The Diggers were first investigated and eventually abandoned as a non-threat that was easily put down. The Quakers were also subdued. Historian Christopher Hill writes that, however weak these groups may have been, Parliament felt threatened by them: “The hysteria of M.P.’s [Members of Parliament’s] contributions to the debate [against the Quakers] shows how frightened they had been, and how delighted they were to seize the opportunity for counter-attack.”

Only the Levellers saw some of their demands met solely by the grace of Cromwell’s Rump Parliament—a parliament purged of all MPs loyal to King Charles I. Such fundamental failure to influence the outcome of one of the most important revolutions in Britain—indeed, one that witnessed its most significant regicide—made two lessons available to future democratic movements. First, Parliament can reform (lesson of the Levellers at Putney). Second, reform can only be done through Parliament, not against it (lesson of Levellers after Putney) or outside of it (lesson of Diggers and Ranters).

Neither the democratic nature of these groups’ demands, nor their radicalism, was crucial for the creation of a consensus. It matters not what they said, just that they failed. Success, however, is a different story. Had their demands succeeded, the post-revolutionary picture in Britain would look different; perhaps, different enough for the parliamentary consensus in Britain to fail. Some of the Levellers’ demands did succeed, and their partial success is just as important to the formation of a parliamentary consensus as the failure of others.

Did the lessons of democratic movements in the 1640s and 1650s survive to inform the actions of democratic movements in the 19th and 20th centuries? Some of the demands of future democratic movements (e.g., the Chartists, the Anti Corn Law League, the Reform League, etc.)

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
22 The only other British regicide was of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 by Queen Elizabeth I.
echo those of the Levellers, the Ranters, and the Quakers. The future generations that drew on their predecessors’ platforms may have also drawn on the successes and failures of those platforms. The successful institutionalization of Cromwell’s reforms in the *Instrument of Government* created the perception among potential political reformers that reform was possible, unless it threatened the existence of Parliament. Various groups still emerged over time to challenge Parliament, but most successful democratic reform would result from the work of parliamentary and civil society pressures, not extra-parliamentary ultimatums. This bottom-up explanation places the understanding of a consensus with the masses, from which extra-parliamentary groups emerged. Another explanation, from the top, would place the faith in parliamentary channels with the elite. The formation of a consensus at the top is compelling because, relative to other European states, “England represents an extreme instance of the continuity of aristocratic power.” Both explanations require a sense of historical determinism. People have to read history, learn from history, and act on their newfound knowledge for a consensus to emerge.

Path dependency often directs such action. Incremental democratization decreases the political cost of subsequent democratization, and reform through Parliament makes further parliamentary reform easier by increasing public knowledge about such actions and, in the process, strengthening the institution of parliament. Thus, if a cost-benefit of any given reform takes past events into account, then direct knowledge by a group of reformers of past events is not necessary for their performance to reflect those events.

Such explanations would not predict a uniform consensus: different groups (or MPs) may learn different historical lessons from the same event. If the bottom-up explanation holds, then the data would show extra-parliamentary groups that petition Parliament, as well as those that do nothing of the sort. A top-down explanation would be suggested by examples of elites challenging the legitimacy of Parliament. Since the data is likely to show both, neither explanation can be privileged over the other. Perhaps the question of how a consensus forms can best be addressed by asking its opposite: How does a consensus fail to form? For that, this essay looks at the French Revolution.

*The French Revolution*

In contrast to the English Revolution, the democrats in France succeeded in destabilizing the French regime during the French Revolution. When King Louis XVI accepted the September 3 constitution in 1791, many thought “the revolution was now complete and ordinary constitutional life could begin.” The Legislative Assembly, however, was unable to maintain control of the regime. First, an earlier oath of allegiance forced on the clergy legitimized dissent against the revolution by creating a large number of refractors. Second, the King’s attempted escape, concealed by the Assembly, linked public discontent with the monarchy to the Assembly. The Legislative Assembly, just like the English Parliament, before the regicide, consisted mostly...

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23 The Quakers, the Levellers and the Chartists called for annual parliaments. The Reform League called for equality within Parliament; the Diggers called for equality outside of Parliament.

24 The *Instrument* called for single-house triennial Parliaments to sit for at least five months; restricted the franchise to property owners or those with an income of at least 200 pounds a year; and granted liberty of worship to all but Catholics.


26 Other authors have suggested different causal links. John Garrard writes that “The survival and democratization of elite ensured that no displaced or disgruntled group had a stake in thwarting democratisation to return to power [unlike post-1918 Germany, East-Central European countries, and post-1989 Russia].” (Garrard, p. 4.)


28 Refractors are members of the clergy who refused to pledge an oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and later faced repression and exportation. (Doyle, p. 147.)
of large landowners.\textsuperscript{29} Its composition alienated it from the Parisian masses, as it attempted to resolve these issues. As the legitimacy of the Assembly waned, so grew the majority’s dissatisfaction with the post-revolutionary settlement; they demanded more. The moderate Assembly was able to neither contain nor channel the resulting discontent. From the massacre at Champs de Mars, to the massacre of over half of the prison population, the Legislative Assembly watched helplessly as the Parisian mob, rejecting the Assembly’s solutions, imposed their own solutions on the streets of Paris.\textsuperscript{30} The “leveling” of hierarchies by the Parisian mob in the French Revolution was very real.\textsuperscript{31} Feudalism was abolished. Against the will of the Assembly, all fiscal privileges for the nobility were eliminated. The organizational structure of the Catholic Church was similarly removed; anti-religion became the new religion. The leveling was much more fundamental, however: 1,200 nobles and 232 priests were executed.\textsuperscript{32} By 1801, 12,500 noble families fled France, and 25,000 priests immigrated or were deported.\textsuperscript{33} As the elites realized that the Assembly could no longer protect them and their interests from the raging mobs, they too withdrew their support.

The inability of the French Assembly to restrain radical democratic solutions through parliamentary channels\textsuperscript{34} contributed to a major de-stabilization of the parliamentary system and to a distrust of the Assembly’s ability to represent the popular will. From 1789 to the present, France has experienced twelve regimes (not counting provisional governments), each swept away by coup d’État from above, revolution from below, or war from without.\textsuperscript{35} The lack of a parliamentary consensus contributed to the endemic political violence in France during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The restored Bourbon Dynasty (following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo) gave way to the July Monarchy after Parisian mobs began to riot in the streets. After a right-wing revolution of 1848, the July Monarchy gave way to the Second Republic. The Second Republic fell in a coup, and gave way to the Second Empire, which ended when a Parisian mob invaded the National Assembly and called for the establishment of the Third Republic.

Post-revolution parliamentary reform was rejected by the masses, even when it was democratic, because they wanted reform on their own terms—that is, outside of parliamentary bodies. When, in 1848, Parisians demanded that the landowner-dominated Constituent Assembly issue support for the Prussian Revolution, the Assembly rejected their demands and closed down all national workshops.\textsuperscript{36} Thwarted in their search for a legislative solution, workers took to the streets in a social revolution. As historians Parry and Girard write, “Despite universal male suffrage, they believed that the only solution was a revolution that would remake society as a whole, not just its political regime.”\textsuperscript{37} Although their attempts were crushed by the National Guard, their action and intent display a violent rejection of the possibility of a parliamentary consensus.

\textsuperscript{29} The Legislative Assembly was elected on Oct. 1, 1791. (Doyle, p. 174.)
\textsuperscript{30} Doyle, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{31} James I, who proclaimed “No Bishop, No King,” would have recoiled when a British painter caricatured the French republicans’ declaration “No God! No Religion! No King! No Constitution!” (George Cruikshank, painting, “The Radical's Arms.”)
\textsuperscript{32} Doyle, pp. 410-420.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} For consistency with the previous section, I use the term “parliament” instead of “legislature.” Different French regimes gave different names (and different powers) to their parliaments. Whether the National Assembly, the Legislative Assembly, or the Legislative Body, I use “parliament” to refer to the lawmaking body of the regime.
\textsuperscript{36} Parry, pp. 62-63.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
The French ruling elite had their own reasons for rejecting the parliamentary consensus. When, in 1851, the Constituent Assembly refused to adopt Louis-Napoleon’s constitutional reforms, he instigated a successful coup d’État. Louis-Napoleon dissolved the Assembly, suppressed the resulting rural insurrection, and created the Second Empire. Since Louis-Napoleon successfully overruled parliament in the name of executive authority, the legislative body of the Second Empire had no authority to initiate laws, could not elect its own president, and could not publish its debates. 38 Ironically, the dissolution of the Second Empire came when Napoleon attempted to strengthen the regime by taking steps to legitimize the legislative body in response to economic discontent. The regime became strongly dependent on popular support at a time when its legitimacy depended on the outcome of the battle between France and Prussia. 39 When news of Prussian victory reached Paris, “crowds invaded the Legislative Body and then marched off to Hotel de Ville in ritual manner to proclaim the Third Republic.” 40

The Third Republic presents a similar picture of parliamentary illegitimacy contributing to political instability. Over 108 governments came and went in the 70 years of republican rule. 41 Most government collapsed in the face of pressure from extra-parliamentary interest groups. 42 Parry and Girard describe how “past failures of political movement made unions suspicious of socialist parties.” 43 When the main trade union, CGT, was formed in 1895, it declared itself outside all political parties. All French unions, in fact, developed in “isolation from the state and political parties.” 44 They were extra-parliamentary groups with no interest in parliamentary action. 45

These few examples focus on post-revolutionary politics of the nineteenth century. They indicate, however, a major factor of the political instability in France after the revolution. The failure of parliament to meet the demands of radical democrats during the French Revolution forced the democrats to take their demands to the streets. Their success outside of the parliamentary structure destroyed the legitimacy of legislative reform. The masses disliked parliament because it did not represent their demands. The monarchy disliked parliament because it refused to bend to its will. Besieged by the monarchy from above and the public from below, the “parliamentarians” were unable to create a consensus around using parliament as the means of reform. The lack of a parliamentary consensus played a crucial role in the political instability of nineteenth century France. The continued success of revolutions and coups created a self-reinforcing cycle that France did not exit until the 21st century; a cycle that arguably still plagues the political legitimacy of the Fifth Republic.

What other factors unique to French politics detracted from the formation of a parliamentary consensus? France faced external threats, which often destabilized the regime. Also, the French economy was often more protectionist than the English laissez faire model. 46 Could those factors better explain the difference in outcomes between post-revolutionary France and post-revolutionary England?

Although external threats contributed to both the outcome of the French Revolution and the instability of political regimes afterwards, enemies abroad do not account for all the unrest at

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38 Parry, p. 63.
39 Parry, pp. 68-69.
40 Ibid.
41 Parry, p. 79.
42 Parry, p. 50.
43 Parry, p. 68.
44 Parry, p. 83.
45 “Unions had a culture of confrontation: to make demands not to provide assistance, to stand apart from politics, to destroy the state and capitalism society, not to reform it.” (Parry, p. 83.)
46 Whereas major extra-parliamentary pressure opposed the Corn Law in England, France successfully guided a similar tariff through parliament in 1892, despite workers’ objections that it will raise the cost of food in urban sectors. (Parry, pp. 90-91.)
home. The direct cause of the fall of the Second Empire lies in France’s military loss to Prussia. The military loss would not have resulted in a political catastrophe, however, had Louis-Napoleon not legitimized the legislative body in the face of an economic malaise. The public’s distrust of a Napoleon-run legislature, not military defeat, underlies the collapse of the Second Republic. Similarly, the Third Republic remained relatively unworried about external threats, yet political instability persisted. Protectionism stalls economic growth, but it also stalls the process of what Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction.” The economic adjustment that follows laissez faire politics is equally as likely to cause political instability as protectionist policies. It is by no means obvious that these factors hurt the chances for consensus any more than parliamentary failure during the French Revolution. This list of possible alternate causalities is far from complete. Post-revolutionary France also was less industrialized than post-revolutionary Britain in the 1650s and 1660s; urbanization developed in Britain earlier and its religious differences were settled more quickly. Further research can evaluate the relative power of these factors to detract from the formation of a parliamentary consensus.

The forces behind political problems and solutions are mutually determined: The strength of the institutions is measured relative to the tasks they face. The English institutions of the seventeenth century draw their strength from a parliamentary tradition that stretches back to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, and from the New Model Army that defeated the King in war and quelled the masses in London. Yet the democratic opposition was weak in 1640 England. The Levellers were never able to rouse the “middling masses,” and the Ranters and Diggers barely tried. In contrast, before 1793 the French military forces lacked loyalty and discipline. They were stretched between internal rebellion and external threats. The divided Legislative Assembly, which lacked England’s parliamentary tradition, had to mend political rifts in the face of growing economic problems. Had the New Model Army been weaker, the democrats stronger, and the economic problems more pervasive in England, then the English democrats, like the French, may have successfully imposed their solutions outside of Parliament, to the detriment of a parliamentary consensus.

Other Roads to Consensus

The English and French revolutions share broad characteristics. In both crises, depressed wages, increased grain prices, government debt, and religious discontent contributed to revolutionary movements that destroyed the regime. Both countries experienced regicide, followed by military rule, and finally a restoration of the monarchy. Thus, their revolutions share many, but not all, causes; follow similar, but not mirror, paths; and exhibit few analogous outcomes.

Because factors similar to those in England correlated with different outcomes in France, those factors can be ruled out as sufficient for the formation of a parliamentary consensus. Thus, regicide, military rule, and a return to monarchy are all insufficient for the formation of a parliamentary consensus.

The English Revolution was by no means the only event to contribute to the formation of a parliamentary consensus. Other events present good candidates for the solidification of reform through Parliament, most notably the Glorious Revolution. The outcome of the struggle between James II and Parliament in 1688 permanently decreased the power of the monarchy to govern. The Jacobites rose to resist Parliament and failed. Parliament gained power and legitimacy at the expense of the power of the monarch. These events undoubtedly contributed to the formation of a parliamentary consensus.

Historians Douglass North and Barry Weingast, however, argue that the Glorious Revolution was the first contributor to such a consensus. They claim that “several failed experiments with alternative political institutions … ushered in the monarchy in 1660. This too

failed, resulting in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and its fundamental redesign of the fiscal and government institutions.”48 From this claim, North and Weingast argue that the Glorious Revolution set England on a dependent historical path towards the formation of Parliament as the sole institutional defender of private property—a cornerstone of modern democracy. There are reasons to prefer 1640 to 1688 as the origin of this path dependent argument. Parliament remarkably persisted throughout the “several failed experiments with alternative political institutions” in 1640-1660. That persistence suggests not only previous path dependency but also elite success in suppressing anti-parliamentary movements. The fundamental restriction on the monarchy came in 1649, when the Rump Parliament executed Charles I, not in 1688, when James fled from England. In fact, 1649 helps explain the quick success of the Glorious Revolution—further proof to start there. A causal link from an event to an outcome can be well understood through comparison. North and Weingast do not compare the “fundamental redesign of the fiscal and government institutions” to similar redesigns elsewhere.

Perhaps a more parsimonious explanation than the one provided above would point to the success of the landowners and merchants in the English Revolution. The Revolution permanently removed feudal tenures, restrictions on enclosure, most monopolies and economic controls, and non-commercial foreign policy.49 The interests of the merchants and landowners that arose out of these changes, however, could have been furthered by a more capital friendly monarch. But, as North and Weingast write, property and Parliament were fatefully united in the 1688 Revolution. The capitalists’ preference for parliamentary solutions, however, emerges from 1640; that preference solidifies by 1688.

Christopher Hill believes that the New Model Army “seemed to have saved the social order.”50 It undoubtedly contributed to the pacification of revolutionary England, as it, for example, entered London and, instead of pillaging the city, diffused tension. However, the Army did not begin the formation of a parliamentary consensus. Had Cromwell continued the Putney debates, Parliament could have been dismissed, and the tension created by Agitators within Army ranks could have erupted into open revolt. Elite rejection of further deconstruction of parliamentary structures, followed by those demands’ failures outside of Parliament, underlies the formation of the parliamentary consensus.

France also lacks the constitutional tradition that in England extends back to the Magna Carta. Did the recognition of parliamentary authority in 1215 put England (and later Britain) on a path to a parliamentary consensus? Perhaps path dependency can be traced back to 1215 (or even earlier, to the Roman invasion in 55 B.C.), but an earlier starting point does not disprove the hypothesis. For the hypothesis to hold, it is enough to prove that the events of 1640-1660 contributed to, but did not wholly determine, the formation of a parliamentary consensus.

49 Stone, p. 72.
### Finding Parliamentary Consensus

Table 1: Analysis of Extra-parliamentary Impact on Democratic Reform.\(^{51}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act of Parliament</th>
<th>Democratic impact</th>
<th>Role of extra-parliamentary groups</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1829 Catholic Emancipation</td>
<td>Allows Catholics to hold civil office</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832 Reform Act</td>
<td>Increases the franchise by 64 percent</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833 Abolition of Slave Trade Act</td>
<td>Abolishes slave trade within the British Empire</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846 Repeal of the Corn Law</td>
<td>Abolishes protectionist measures against urban civil society</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867 Reform Act</td>
<td>Increases the electorate by 82 percent</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870 Education Act</td>
<td>Establishes public school infrastructure</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872 Ballot act</td>
<td>Creates the secret ballot</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874 Trade Union Act</td>
<td>Eases trade union negotiations</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act</td>
<td>Distinguishes between corrupt and illegal electoral behavior</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884 Third Reform Act</td>
<td>Universalizes the household franchise</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918 Fourth Reform Act(^2)</td>
<td>Extends the vote to men over 21</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows eleven democratic reforms in England along with the impact of extra-parliamentary groups. The table reveals that extra-parliamentary groups played a decreasing role over time. Four acts of Parliament required major extra-parliamentary support before 1850. After 1850, four acts of Parliament required minimal extra-parliamentary support; three acts required none. The presence of extra-parliamentary support does not necessarily disprove the formation of a parliamentary consensus. Their decreasing role suggests that Parliament and parliamentary groups played an increasingly important role relative to extra-parliamentary groups after the 1850s.

Extra-parliamentary participation often relies on a parliamentary consensus. The Committee for Abolition played a crucial role in pushing through Parliament the 1807 Abolition of Slave Trade Act and the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. The Committee used parliamentary petitioning as the main method of democratic reform.\(^{53}\) The Catholic Association, the main driving force behind the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act, similarly resorted to parliamentary petitioning. The superiority of parliamentary petitioning over other methods (e.g., rioting, striking, etc.) becomes apparent when looking at an extra-parliamentary group that tried both. Chartists began promoting their democratic platform by petitioning the government in 1839.\(^{54}\) Parliament immediately rejected their radical demands. In response, Chartists organized simultaneous uprisings around the country. Violence erupted between the protestors and the

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\(^{51}\) The data on extra-parliamentary groups is gathered primarily from Hugh Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy* (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 28-78; John Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), pp. ix-xv. A “major” role describes an essential effect—that is, without the group’s support, the bill would have failed. A “minimal” role describes a contributing effect—that is, the group’s support helped, but the argument that it was essential is much harder to make. Groups play “no” role if they did not contribute to the bill’s passage at all, or their contributions were highly insignificant at best.

\(^{52}\) Also known as the Representation of the People Act.


\(^{54}\) The Chartists’ *People’s Charter* had six demands: manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, secret ballot, equal electoral districts, no property qualifications for MPs, and MP salaries. (Cunningham, p. 47.)
police—twenty Chartists were killed, 500 were detained. The movement did not end there, however. Faced with prison and obscurity, the group de-radicalized and returned to parliamentary petitioning. The evolution of this major extra-parliamentary movement shows that, while parliamentary consensus was not always effective, deviations from this method of reform were punished and some extra-parliamentary groups were even coerced to work through Parliament.

The Anti-Corn Law League relied on Parliament to repeal the Corn Law. On the one hand, Richard Cobden, one of the leaders of the League, complained that “the Government was based on corruption and the offspring of vice, corruption, violence, intimidation and bribery.” On the other hand, the League resorted to corruption and vice to win seats in the Commons during the 1841 general election. Of the League’s leaders, George Wilson became an MP in 1830s, Cobden in 1841, and John Bright in 1843. The League formally became a parliamentary party group. The Anti-Corn Law League clearly understood the power of Parliament. Cobden later remarked, “You speak with a loud voice when you are talking from the floor of the House, and if you have anything to say which hits hard, it is a very long whip and reaches all over the kingdom.” It was because the League worked within Parliament, not in spite of it, that they were finally able to repeal the Corn Law in 1846.

The 1870 Education Act further illuminates the evolution of groups from extra-parliamentary to parliamentary status. The National Education League, an extension of the Liberal party, was established in 1869 to campaign for free, compulsory, and non-sectarian schools. After the League successfully lobbied for the passage of the Education Act, the party replaced the League with the National Liberal Federation to “incorporate other Liberal pressure groups,” and to elect MPs. Using the examples of the National Education League and the Anti-Corn Law League, it can be argued that from the late nineteenth century, politics in Britain were properly party politics (with the end of independent MPs). Compared to the Anti-Corn Law League, the Reform League had a much smaller impact on the 1867 Reform Act. The Act became a pillar of British democratization by increasing the size of the electorate by 82 percent. Most accounts privilege elite politics over extra-parliamentary agitation in the story of the Act’s passage.

Extra-parliamentary groups had a minimal impact on the passage of the 1872 Ballot Act, which allowed for secret ballots; groups also played a minimal role in passing the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act, which distinguished between corrupt and illegal electoral behavior. Finally, extra-parliamentary groups played no distinguishable role in the passage of the 1884 Third Reform Act, which universalized household franchise, or the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which extended the vote to all men over 21.

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56 Introduced in 1815, this protectionist measure imposed duties on imported corn to ease competition for British corn growers. (Cunningham, p. 45.)
58 Upon their election to Parliament, Bright, Cobden and Wilson formed a group of like-minded MPs with extra-parliamentary support. Thus, the evolution from extra-parliamentary to parliamentary groups was formed. (Heidar, p. 6.)
60 Cunningham, p. 124.
61 Ibid.
62 The Act increased the franchise by 82 percent by giving the vote to every male adult householder living in a borough constituency and male lodgers paying 10 pounds. (John Garrard, Democratisation in Britain.)
63 Garrard, p. 39.
64 Cunningham, p. 69.
65 Cunningham, pp. 104-105.
Extra-parliamentary anti-parliament pressure played a significant role in the passage of the 1832 Reform Act, which increased the franchise by 64 percent. Revolutionary sentiment “hung in the air” as the working class threatened violence. Extra-parliamentary pressure was such that the Duke of Wellington remarked, “It may be relied upon that we shall have a Revolution.” Expectations of a divergence of consensus arose, and some MPs mused that public opinion had outgrown “the channels … it has been accustomed to run through.” But this pressure did not give rise to any significant extra-parliamentary group. Elite intervention prevented these expectations from materializing. Working class violence did not erupt. Reform was used to suppress radical dissent, while reinforcing the constitution’s property-based qualification for political participation.

Elite intervention illuminates the dual nature of the parliamentary consensus. The lack of consensus in France was apparent as groups from above and below attacked the parliamentary structure. The consensus in England at times suffered attacks from the bottom, but elites rescued the consensus from the anger of the masses. The English Revolution suggests the necessity of elite intervention and elite stake in Parliament. The history of French regimes after 1789 suggests that both elite and popular acceptances of a consensus are necessary for parliamentary solutions to persist. When elites pushed reform through parliament, the public grew distrustful of parliament. When parliament successfully addressed public concerns, elites sought to reform the institution of parliament.

The declining impact of extra-parliamentary groups on the passage of democratic reforms suggests the formation of a parliamentary consensus. The evolution of groups’ means from non-parliamentary to parliamentary presents further proof of that consensus. Most importantly, by the beginning of the twentieth century, extra-parliamentary groups either played no role in democratic reform or participated in the reform mostly through parliamentary channels. In 1890, the following passage appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*:

Parliament is King; it is the modern embodiment of the power of the nation; internal attempts to deprive it of its strength are aimed at that very sovereignty of the people which it is the boast of our reformers to have established on a truly democratic basis.

In 1892, *The Times* of London declared democracy to be King in England. Almost 250 years after the elites rejected assaults on the parliamentary structure, the formation of the parliamentary consensus was complete.

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid, p. 32.
Table 2: Omitted Democratic Reforms.\textsuperscript{72}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act of Parliament</th>
<th>Democratic impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1689 Bill of Rights</td>
<td>Limits royal power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689 Toleration Acts</td>
<td>Limits power of Anglican courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824 Repeal of Anti-Combination Laws</td>
<td>Legalizes trade unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828 Repeal of Test and Corporation Acts</td>
<td>Allows Dissenters to hold public office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850 Irish Franchise Act</td>
<td>Increases franchise from 45,000 to 163,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850 Small Tenements Act</td>
<td>Extends the franchise to tenants (renters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854 Corrupt Practices Act</td>
<td>Attempts to define corrupt electoral practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858 Jews Relief Act</td>
<td>Admits Jews to Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859 Act</td>
<td>Abolishes property qualification for MPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act</td>
<td>Legalizes peaceful picketing; decriminalizes trade union activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 Local Government Act</td>
<td>Establishes elected district councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907 Qualification of Women Act</td>
<td>Allows women to stand as municipal councils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extra-parliamentary groups analyzed here suffer from selection bias—those that did not further democratization, in terms of the franchise and egalitarian reform, were omitted. Because many omitted groups could have used non-parliamentary means (drawing inspiration from Guy Fawkes instead of Richard Cobden) the evidence is lopsided. Even if all the omitted groups advocated non-parliamentary solutions, however, their failure would still contribute to a case for parliamentary consensus. Also omitted is a study of extra-parliamentary influence on non-democratic acts.

Table 1 does not provide the full dataset of democratic reforms, and does not analyze the role extra-parliamentary groups to the fullest extent. Table 2 provides a list of twelve democratic reforms for further analysis. The dataset of unexamined reforms in which extra-parliamentary movements participated is large enough to disprove the hypothesis. However, the analysis in this paper captures the largest extra-parliamentary movements. Even if most democratic reforms listed in Table 2 required extra-parliamentary support through non-parliamentary channels, the relative smallness of these groups would mitigate the result. Further, seventeenth century English history suggests that small extra-parliamentary groups are unlikely candidates for successful solutions.

Concluding Discussion

Did the Parliamentary elites’ successful rejection of democratic challenges during the English Revolution contribute to the formation of a political consensus around petitioning Parliament as the means of democratic reform? A better proof of this hypothesis would compare the English Revolution to other revolutions to eliminate insufficient factors. All factors of those revolutions would be analyzed to eliminate those factors, the existence of which is not necessary for the formation of a parliamentary consensus. The consensus would be ascertained by measuring the power of parliamentary parties, all extra-parliamentary groups, elite rhetoric, and revolutionary sentiment. These factors would be compared across different countries to control for political idiosyncrasies. Even then, the hypothesis would hold true only to the extent that institutional path dependency holds true. The causal link between the English Revolution and later gradualism requires path dependency.

The proof presented in this paper is far from perfect. Only two revolutions are compared, so the factors these revolutions share cannot be ruled out as necessary. Only some factors in the revolutions are compared, so factors unique to these revolutions may have contributed to the formation of the consensus. Further, this proof does not include the measure of parliamentary groups, elite rhetoric, or control for factors unique to England’s political environment.

However, these shortcomings do not warrant the argument’s dismissal. Even if other factors in the English Revolution contributed to the formation of a consensus, this paper makes an important statement about the affect of elite action on parliamentary consensus. Even if much unexamined evidence speaks against such consensus, the examined evidence suggests elite impact on the attempts to form a consensus. In the question of elite influence on the institutionalization of Parliament, this paper both suggests a direction and takes the first step in that direction.
Works Cited


