Legislating Themselves Out of Office: Electoral Reform & Parties as Non-Unitary Actors

Abigail L. Heller*

March 3, 2021

Abstract

Many theories of electoral reform assume parties are unitary actors and that a party in power will change the electoral system to maximize its share of legislative seats. This approach overlooks that electoral reforms may have different consequences across members of a single party — even when reforms are expected to benefit the party as a whole, they may disadvantage certain members. Moreover, if the proposed reform will damage the electoral prospects of members, the party leadership is hindered in their ability to wield certain incentives they would usually use to control members. Given this, why would a rank-and-file legislator support an electoral reform that is likely to cost her the seat? I argue legislators are more likely to support such a reform — to legislative themselves out of office — when they expect compensation from the party leadership in the form of extra-parliamentary patronage (appointments) if they lose the election or rewards if they retain the seat. I test this argument using information on the career trajectories of members of Parliament in the United Kingdom and leveraging the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act.

Much of the electoral reform literature suggests that parties — generally conceptualized as unitary actors — will change the electoral system when they believe they can increase their legislative seat share by doing so (Benoit 2004, 2007; Benoit and Hayden 2004; Benoit and Schiemann 2001; Birch et al. 2002; Boix 1999; Colomer 2004, 2005; Kaminski 2002).[1] However, others have recognized that *intra-party* politics also affect electoral reform. For example, McElwain (2008) illustrates how the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan was prevented from adopting single-member district plurality (SMDP) despite evidence that doing so would increase the LDP's seat share. They were thwarted by party backbenchers (rank-and-file legislators) who feared SMDP would damage their chances of reelection. Similarly, Remington and Smith (1996) describe the adoption of the 1995 Russian electoral law as a case in which the preferences of individuals for retaining their parliamentary seats outweighed concerns about maximizing their policy influence with the result that the 1995 system was very similar to that imposed by decree in 1993.

These cases in which major electoral reforms failed in the legislature raise a novel puzzle obscured by the traditional focus on unitary parties. If it is possible for rank-and-file legislators to stop reforms that the party leadership wishes to pass, why do reforms that disadvantage a significant portion of the party ever pass? Electoral reforms may have differing consequences across members of a single party — even if a reform is expected to benefit the party overall, it may disadvantage certain party members (McElwain 2008). Moreover, there are cases (often overlooked in the existing literature) in which parties pass reforms that are expected to *decrease* their overall seat share. For example, in 1998, the Labour Party in Britain passed a bill that reduced the number of seats in Scotland despite the fact that Scotland was a party stronghold at the time (Gay 2010). While these types of reforms may be sensible if parties are treated as unitary actors, they are harder to understand from the perspective of party backbenchers. Why would an individual politician vote in favor of an electoral reform that is likely to cost her the seat? In other words, why would a politician

[1] Recent work has also considered other motivations for reform besides seat-maximization, including coalition management and control (Cox, Fiva, and Smith 2019; Gandhi, Heller, and Reuter 2020).

legislate herself out of office? In particular, what affects party backbenchers' — rank-and-file legislators who do not have a party leadership position and thus might be more likely to rebel against a reform that is not uniformly beneficial — support for electoral reform?

Making these questions even more vexing, at first glance it might seem as though the lessons from the literature on party cohesion do not apply in the case of electoral reforms. This type of situation is not particularly conducive to voluntary party cohesion. Voluntary party cohesion that relies on shared preferences among like-minded individuals or the fact that party affiliation is beneficial because it provides voters with informational shortcuts that help legislators develop a "brand name" and helps legislators coordinate amongst themselves to achieve their goals (e.g., Aldrich 1995; Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Duverger 1963; Hicken 2009; Laver and Shepsle 1999) is unlikely to work in this situation. After all, there is little incentive to voluntarily vote with one's party on a bill that one believes, if passed, will most likely cause one to lose the seat.

Moreover, party discipline may be hard to enforce in such a situation because party leaders are hampered in their ability to use some of the "carrots and sticks" on which they can usually rely. Control over patronage, election support (including nomination/selection and funding), career advancement within the legislature, information, legislative rules and agenda, and the timing of dissolutions and elections have all been cited as ways the party leadership can ensure discipline (e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Cheibub 2007; Cox 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Duverger 1963; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009). In the context of a proposal for reform that is likely to harm the election prospects of individual legislators, some of these methods are either inapplicable or lose their effectiveness. After all, threats by the party leadership of withdrawing election support or deselection from a preferred committee lose much of their force if the legislator expects to lose the election anyway.[2]

However, the party discipline literature tends to consider carrots and sticks that party

---

[2] Note this is true even if we assume politicians are not purely office seeking since it is generally through participation in parties and govenrment that one can have policy influence (Cheibub 2007).

2

leaders can wield within the legislature such as committee assignments or around elections like control over nomination (depending on the electoral system and the level of party centralization). For example, the literature that explores party discipline in the UK often focuses on the relationship between loyalty to the party (in terms of votes over one's career) and cabinet positions or other parliamentary offices (e.g., Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009). Nevertheless, it has been noted that some classes of members of Parliament (MPs) are less likely to be controlled using ministerial appointments either because they have previously served as ministers or because they feel they have no chance of ever doing so (Benedetto and Hix 2007). Looking beyond cabinet appointments, I argue there are also extra-parliamentary carrots that leaders can use to induce support for reform. Party leaders can offer incentives for supporting electoral reform that *do not require recipients to hold elected office.*

I argue that backbenchers will be more likely to support electoral reform, even if it damages their individual reelection prospects, when they expect compensation from the party leadership in case of an electoral loss (and possibly a reward using the usual parliamentary channels even if they do manage to retain their seat). In other words, when MPs expect the party leadership to "take care of them" by providing patronage in the form of appointments they will be more likely to vote in favor of a reform that they expect is likely to damage their future reelection chances. This is one way that party leaders can repurpose some of the tools they might use to discipline members to instead compensate those who expect to lose their seats and thus gain their legislative support. These rewards for those that manage to retain their seats or compensation for those that lose as a result of the reform can take a variety of forms depending on the context. I test this theory using extensive information on the careers of MPs in the United Kingdom (UK) who voted on the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act, which drastically altered the electoral landscape in Britain. Specifically, I explore compensation by the party in the form of honors (peerages and baronetcies) and decorations (knighthoods) and rewards of offices within parliament, including cabinet positions.

Despite a large literature on party cohesion and discipline, the electoral reform literature

generally sidesteps this issue by assuming parties are unitary actors.[3] Thus, there is little scholarly work on why individual legislators would vote in favor of reforms that may damage their future prospects. In part, this is because of the focus on unitary parties, but it is also because the focus on seat maximization often leads to an implicit assumption that everyone in the party would stand to benefit equally from a reform. Or at the very least, that all members of the party will be equally motivated by the opportunity to maximize the seat share of the party overall, regardless of what effect that would have on their own electoral prospects. By highlighting issues of intra-party politics frequently overlooked in the discussion of electoral reform, this paper contributes to the electoral reform literature. Moreover, by highlighting the inducements that party leaders can offer that are outside the legislature, I also speak to the literature on party discipline.

Additionally, the historical case that I use to test the theory — the passage of the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act — is important and worthy of study in and of itself. While the UK is often thought of as the prototypical case of single-member district plurality electoral rules, it was only with this Act that single-member districts became the norm (Cox 1987; Hart 1992). Prior to the reform, the majority of MPs were elected from multimember districts. By drastically reducing the number of dual-member constituencies and therefore eliminating the practice of the two main parties — the Liberals and Conservatives — each running one candidate in a district, electoral competition was significantly increased (Hawkins 1998; Mason 2015). As important as the Redistribution of Seats Act was to the creation of the electoral system we are now familiar with in the UK, it is often overshadowed by the Representation of the People Act 1884, or the Third Reform Act, which extended the franchise. Moreover, the passage of these two bills was linked (as I describe below). Thus, by studying the choices of individual legislators, this paper also contributes to better understanding how the Redistribution of Seats Act came to be, which is, in itself, important.

---

[3] In a rare exception to the observation that the electoral reform and party discipline literatures are usually kept separate, Cox and Ingram (1992) consider the effect of electoral reform (suffrage expansion) in the UK on party cohesion. In contrast, I study how party discipline tactics may enable electoral reform.

In the next section, I begin by providing a theory of why legislators may vote themselves out of office. Next, I describe the empirical context in greater detail. While the theory I present is general, I reserve discussion of the specific hypotheses I test until after the empirical context has been presented because the specific inducements that parties can use to elicit support for a reform depend on the context. This leads to a discussion of the research design. I then present the results of the analyses and robustness tests before concluding.

Why Legislate Oneself Out of Office?

Much of the electoral reform literature treats parties as office-seeking unitary actors (e.g., Benoit 2007; Boix 1999; Colomer 2004). However, we know that parties are collections of individuals and may behave in a more or less unified way (e.g., Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Cox 1987). Therefore, intra-party dynamics must be taken seriously to truly understand electoral reform. In addition to the motivating examples of Japan and Russia in which the reelection prospects of backbenchers prevented electoral reforms that may have increased the party's seat share or policy influence (McElwain 2008; Remington and Smith 1996), there have been cases in which parties have passed reforms despite expectations that their seat share will decrease. The UK Labour Party passed the Scotland Act 1998 which reduced the number of parliamentary seats in Scotland — a Labour stronghold at the time (Gay 2010). Moreover, even if a party's overall legislative seat share may increase with a particular reform, it does not immediately follow that all current office holders will benefit. Thus, the question of the conditions under which individual legislators will support electoral reform is critically important.

In many ways, the problem for the party leadership of inducing members to support electoral reform is the same as the problem of inducing them to support any other type of legislation, with two important caveats. First, in the case of electoral reform, some of the carrots and sticks parties have at their disposal to enforce discipline lose their effectiveness.

For example, control over things like ministerial appointments, committee assignments, the legislative agenda, and the timing of dissolution (which have all be cited as ways for the leadership to maintain discipline; e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Cheibub 2007; Cox 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Duverger 1963; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009) is unlikely to benefit the party leadership in this context. If a legislator expects to lose her seat because of the reform, the offer of (or threat of removal from) a plum committee assignment (one of the most common inducements in parliamentary systems; Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999) or the threat of a snap election are unlikely to persuade her to support the reform. Second, in some cases, electoral reform can expose a much broader section of the party to lower chances of reelection than other legislation. Rather than the need to "buy off" a handful of legislators or leaders being willing and able to sacrifice some votes, electoral reform can complicate the reelection prospects of a large minority (or even majority) of a party. This is even more problematic if reform requires a super-majority to pass (which may be more likely for institutional rules such as electoral reforms than other types of legislation). Nevertheless, I argue that the party leadership can still wield certain carrots to induce support.

A member of parliament should be more likely to vote in favor of an electoral reform that harms her reelection prospects if she expects to be compensated or otherwise "taken care of" by the party in exchange for her support. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that the party leadership prefers that the reform passes. Although this may at first appear to be a strong assumption, it is plausible for several reasons. First, in the parliamentary systems that are the focus of this paper, government-sponsored bills are much more common than private member's bills (those that are not proposed by the government).[4] This means that electoral reform proposals may well come from the government itself as opposed to the issue being forced by the opposition. Indeed, a large segment of the electoral reform literature was initially driven by the puzzle of why a party in government would change the system

---

[4] See, for example, Rush (2001) for a discussion of how government business came to dominate the British parliamentary calendar over the course of the nineteenth century.

that brought them to power. Second, there are a number of reasons the party leadership may support an electoral reform proposal even if it damages the reelection chances of some of their members. They may believe that the party as a whole will be better off (McElwain 2008), wish to disadvantage opposition parties (Higashijima and Chang 2016; Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002), use electoral reform as a way to increase control over members (Cox, Fiva, and Smith 2019; Gandhi, Heller, and Reuter 2020), or trade the passage of electoral reform in exchange for support on some other priority. Thus, the question under investigation is why would a member of the governing party's backbench support a reform that reduces her personal chances of reelection?

The legislator may vote in favor of reform because she believes that her party will "take care of her" in the event that the reform damages her prospects or costs her the seat. In other words, if she fails to win reelection, the legislator expects the party to compensate her for her sacrifice. This does not preclude the possibility of rewarding those who maintain their seat despite the risks posed by the reform. This may also occur, especially given that there may be uncertainty regarding who the reform will hurt and the need to induce support occurs prior to the realization of the effect of the reform on the election fate of members. Therefore, in addition to compensation for those who do lose their seats, the party leadership may use promises of rewards to induce support even for those who "survive" the effects of the reform. If these inducements are used, they can take the form of more traditional carrots considered in existing literature such as committee assignments or parliamentary office (e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009).

Ideally, it would be possible to track legislator expectations or promises of rewards and compensation made by the party prior to a reform. However, any such promises are likely to be hidden (or, if not actively hidden, difficult to track in a systematic way). Nevertheless, one observable implication of the argument is that those legislators who support the reform (as the party leadership prefers), run in the next election, and lose their seats are more likely than those who abstained or voted against the reform to receive compensation and patronage

from the party. This compensation could take the form of government pensions, diplomatic appointments, appointments to positions within the party that do not require election, or even decorations such as knighthoods. If the party also rewards those who supported the reform and managed to keep their seat, those rewards are likely to take a different form than the compensation for those who lost. Decorations such as knighthoods may also apply for this latter group, but other types of rewards might include prime committee assignments or other positions within parliament.

It is worth noting that this compensation or reward from the party leadership need not be given out of a sense of fairness. Rather, the party leadership depends on the support of their backbenchers in order to pass preferred legislation, in this case, electoral reform. It may be that after realizing this legislation has disadvantaged members of their own party, the party leadership seeks to compensate them, motivated by fairness. However, that need not be the case. While there is an obvious commitment problem, it is overcome because the party leadership have a relatively long time horizon and reputation concerns — they know they will need to be able to induce support for legislation in the future. Therefore, breaking promises of compensation or reward sets a dangerous precedent that makes it more difficult to control legislators in the future. In addition, losing one election does not preclude the possibility of running and winning at a later date. The party leadership may want to recruit these people again in the future. Therefore, it is in the interests of the party leadership to provide this compensation even if they are not motivated by concerns of fairness.

Empirical Context

In order to test this theory, I exploit the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act in the United Kingdom.[5] This provides an ideal test case for the theory for several reasons. First, as I describe in the subsection below, the bill was passed by the Liberal government. Liberal MPs supported the bill despite (correctly) expecting that it would harm their reelection

---

[5] Note that at this time, the United Kingdom included all of Ireland.

prospects. While the party leadership wished to pass the bill as part of a compromise that would allow them to achieve other, more important (in their view), goals, the puzzle of why backbenchers supported it remains. Second, a division (roll-call vote) was held on this bill, allowing me to determine how individual MPs voted, which is critical for the analysis. Since individual votes are not always recorded, there are other reforms that fit the theoretical story, but for which it is impossible to test the empirical implications due to an inability to determine how individual MPs voted.[6] Third, Rush (2001) has collected information on the careers of MPs from this time period, allowing me to empirically track what happened to those who voted on the bill. Specifically, I am able to use this data (in combination with additional data described below) to construct measures of compensation and rewards in the form of appointments. Before turning to the research design, it is helpful to consider the context of the Redistribution of Seats Act as well as the types of compensation the party leadership had at their disposal at the time. This will allow me to ground the hypotheses and design in the specific context.

The 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act

The 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act was passed with support from both the Liberal and Conservative parties during the Liberal government of William Gladstone (1880–1885). Although the Act actually increased the overall number of seats in parliament from 652 to 670 (Uberoi and White 2015), the distribution of these seats across the country was drastically altered. In particular, many constituencies were changed from multimember districts (most frequently, dual-member) to single-member districts. Prior to the reform, more than two-thirds of the 652 members were elected from multimember districts, whereas after the reform, only 27 such constituencies remained (Hart 1992; see also, Cox 1987).[7] Moreover, although the cities saw an increase in representation, in other areas, representation was significantly

---

[6] E.g., I am unable to leverage the passage of the Scotland Act 1998 (referenced above) because I cannot identify how individual MPs voted.

[7] The last of the dual-member constituencies were eliminated in 1948 (with the change taking effect at the 1950 election; Parry 2012).

reduced and around the country, electoral competition was increased (Hawkins 1998; Mason 2015). In part, competition was increased by the reform because the introduction of pre-dominately single-member districts ended the practice of both Liberals and Conservatives each nominating only a single candidate in dual-member constituencies (Mason 2015).

The Redistribution of Seats Act was the result of a compromise between Liberals and Conservatives. The Liberals wished to pass an extension of the franchise in the form of a Representation of the People Bill,[8] but it was halted by Conservatives in the House of Lords until the Liberals promised to pass a bill to redistribute seats (Butler 1963; Evans 2000; Hawkins 1998; Mason 2015). Both parties expected franchise extension to benefit the Liberals, while the redistribution of seats (particularly the change to predominately single-member districts) was expected to benefit the Conservatives (Bogdanor 1981; Butler 1963; Carstairs 1980; Dunbabin 1988; Evans 2000; Mason 2015).

Although it is clear why the Liberal leadership wished to pass the Redistribution of Seats Bill — it was necessary in order to pass the franchise extension, which they valued even more — the question remains: why would Liberal backbenchers go along with the leadership and pass the bill? They (rightly) expected to be disadvantaged by the redistribution and resulting increased competition. Additionally, the extension of the franchise had been passed prior to the redistribution of seats, so it is conceivable that Liberal backbenchers could have rebelled in the vote on redistribution in an attempt to protect their seats. Moreover, although party cohesion was higher in the 1880s than it had been in several earlier decades, it was below its 1870s level (Rush 2001), and party discipline was still not as well developed as it has been since the turn of the twentieth century — only the previous year a cabinet member defied the whip (in other words, failed to follow voting instructions; Mason 2015). Therefore, it is reasonable to ask why MPs would legislate themselves out of office, given that existing historical analyses suggest they knew the reform would damage their reelection prospects.

---

[8] This became the Representation of the People Act 1884, also known as the Third Reform Act.

Compensation in 1880's Britain

The Liberal Party leadership wished to pass the Redistribution of Seats Bill in order to achieve their goal of franchise extension. But the redistribution of seats would damage the electoral prospects of sitting Liberal MPs. What forms of compensation were available to party leaders to maintain party discipline and ensure the passage of the bill?

There are several ways in which parties may have rewarded or compensated members during this time period. Rush (2001) documents how members in the nineteenth century often hoped to receive honors such as peerages or baronetcies or decorations such as knighthoods. Although granted by the monarch, the Prime Minister was (and is to this day) able to recommend people for such titles (Guttsman 1963; Mason 2015). These honors and decorations would allow the party to compensate those who lose their seat in parliament as they are not dependent on membership in the House of Commons. In fact, peerages also confer a seat in the House of Lords and thus prevent one from serving in the House of Commons in the future. Another way MPs theoretically may have been compensated with extra-parliamentary roles during this time was through diplomatic appointments such as ambassadorships. However, using data from Mackie (2017), I determined that of the more than 600 MPs who were sitting at the time the Redistribution of Seats Bill was passed, only five ever served as diplomats (and only two did so after 1885). Thus, empirically, diplomatic appointments were not a common form of compensation at this time period and I do not analyze them further below.

There are also severals ways in which parties could have rewarded members during the time period even if they retained their seat in the House of Commons. Sitting members could be rewarded with parliamentary offices, up to and including cabinet positions. Additionally, as parties became increasingly cohesive and organized in the second half of the nineteenth century (including developing extra-parliamentary organizations; Rush 2001), this opened up the possibility of compensation in the form of party appointments (either within parliament

or as compensation if someone lost their seat). However, due to data availability, I focus on peerages, baronetcies, knighthoods, and appointments to parliamentary offices.

In order to understand how knighthoods, baronetcies, and peerages serve as forms of compensation, it is worth briefly considering the role of honors in nineteenth century Britain. Guttsman notes that in the nineteenth century "a knighthood, a Baronetcy and, above all, a Peerage were often bestowed as a reward for help given or in anticipation of favours to be received" (1963, 116). Moreover, over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, as the party system developed, so did "the practice of rewarding men and women for services to their party," including "for faithful but inconspicuous partisanship on the backbenches" (Guttsman 1963, 120, 121). Although parliament became increasingly diverse during the nineteenth century (Rush 2001), MPs were sill relatively wealthy so the benefits of such appointments are likely to be primarily in terms of prestige (or in the case of peerages and cabinet positions, continued or expanded policy influence) rather than economics.

At the time, the vast majority of peerages were hereditary peerages. The life peerages that are common today were introduced in 1958, but there were a handful of "Law Lords" during the late-nineteenth century that were granted a non-hereditary peerage on the basis of their legal expertise. Peerages, unlike knighthoods and baronetcies, entitle the holder to sit in the House of Lords and therefore disqualify them from taking a seat in the House of Commons in the future. Importantly, because peerages are hereditary, I only count *new peerages* as a form of compensation since inheriting a title is clearly not an appointment controlled by the party. Similarly, in the case of baronetcies, which are effectively hereditary knighthoods (thus above most knighthoods, but the lowest form of honor and so below peerages), I only count *new baronetcies* as a form of compensation and do not count inherited baronetcies.

Theoretical Expectations in this Case

What are the theoretical expectations in the context of the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Bill? Recall, the Liberals expected that this reform would damage their reelection prospects

(due to the move away from dual-member seats and increased competition). For some types of reforms (or legislation more generally), it might be possible to identify ex ante specific members who will be at risk and thus in need of additional incentives to support the proposal. In this context however, I argue that this would have been nearly impossible, despite knowledge of the proposed district boundaries ahead of time. The reason is that district boundaries as well as district magnitude changed. Additionally, only the previous year, the franchise was extended. Although no election had occurred under the new franchise, it was widely expected that the extension of the franchise would benefit the Liberals. The expected countervailing effects of the two reforms (Bogdanor 1981; Butler 1963; Carstairs 1980; Dunbabin 1988; Evans 2000; Mason 2015) combined with changing district boundaries would have made it difficult to predict the election outcome in individual districts (and of course this was also before widespread polling of the sort we see today). Moreover, a further complication was that it was relatively common at this time for individuals to change the districts in which they ran (completely independently of the reform). This ability to switch districts would have further complicated an effort to predict who would be most at risk within the Liberal Party. In summary, the reform put everyone at risk. At the margins, some would have been more at risk than others, but overall, in terms of what could be reasonably predicted ex ante, the election risk posed by the reform was relatively uniform.

In this type of relatively uniform risk scenario, I argue that all Liberal backbenchers are roughly equally in need of inducements to vote in favor of the reform. However, if they support the bill, the *form* their reward or compensation takes is likely to differ depending on their fate in the first election after the reform (the 1885 election). Those who lose in 1885 are more likely to be compensated in forms that do not require the recipient to be a sitting legislator — through appointments to new peerages, baronetcies, and knighthoods. In contrast, those who succeed in keeping their seat in parliament after the 1885 election are more likely to be rewarded for supporting the reform though appointments within parliament — to offices including cabinet positions (consistent with the existing literature on party

discipline in the UK; Benedetto and Hix 2007; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009). Since we are unable to observe promises of compensation or rewards, I focus on the following observable implications of the general theory applied to this case:

Hypothesis 1. Among Liberals who run in the 1885 election and lose, those who supported the Redistribution of Seats Bill are more likely to receive compensation in the form of peerages, baronetcies, and knighthoods than those who did not support the reform.

Hypothesis 2. Among Liberals who run in the 1885 election and win, those who supported the Redistribution of Seats Bill are more likely to receive rewards in the form of parliamentary offices (up to and including cabinet positions) than those who did not support the reform.

In the case of those who do not win in the 1885, I focus on those who *ran* since retirement may or may not have been induced by the reform itself. Of those who chose not to run in 1885, some proportion would have retired from parliament at this time regardless, while others may have been induced to retire prematurely because of the expectation of a difficult election or election loss in 1885. While the latter group may also have been compensated by the party leadership if they supported the bill, empirically it is impossible to disentangle the group of retirees who would be eligible for compensation from those who would not. Therefore, I focus on those who ran and lost.

Finally, it is worth observing that it is technically possible for an individual to receive any of these forms of compensation (peerage, baronetcy, knighthood, or parliamentary office) regardless of their fate in the 1885 election. Knighthoods and baronetcies in particular, can be given regardless of whether the recipient is a member of Parliament. Peerages can likewise be awarded to someone whether or not they are an MP. I argue it is more likely to go to those who lose because peers are disqualified from sitting in the House of Commons in the future, but theoretically, a peerage could be awarded to a sitting MP who would then vacate their seat in the Commons. Lastly, while parliamentary offices can only be awarded to sitting members of parliament, losing the 1885 election is not a guarantee that one can never

win reelection. Indeed, there was also an election in 1886 which would have provided an opportunity to resume serving in the Commons even if one lost in 1885. However, similar to peerages, I argue that rewards in the form of parliamentary offices are more likely for those who win in 1885 even if it is possible for those who lost to secure one at some point.

Research Design

The data for this paper come from several sources. First, I use data collected by Eggers and Spirling (2014a) to determine a) the relevant sample of members of Parliament (i.e., those who were sitting at the time of the vote on the Redistribution of Seats Act[9]), the party affiliation of all MPs,[10] and c) the vote choice of each individual MP. While a number of divisions on the bill occurred, I focus on the Third Reading or the last vote in the House of Commons before it was sent to the House of Lords for approval for two reasons. First, this is the division in which MPs were voting on the version of the text that most closely matches the final Act. Second, the other votes on the bill that went to a division (in other words, for which I can obtain information on the way individual MPs voted) were all on amendments (either those made in the Commons or reviewing those added in the Lords) or procedure rather than on the full text of the bill itself (Eggers and Spirling 2014a; Hansard, n.d.). In the division on the Third Reading on May 11, 1885, 117 MPs (from both the Conservative and Liberal parties) voted in favor of the reform with 34[11] against (Eggers and Spirling 2014a).[12] Second, most of the data on appointments and the data necessary for many of the control variables comes from Rush (2001). Rush (2001) has extensive information on all UK MPs from 1868 through the end of the twentieth century and most importantly for

---

[9] The total number of MPs in my data after accounting for early exits due to death or resignation is 636.

[10] Specifically, I use party affiliation in 1885. Although there is a concern that this variable could be post-treatment (after the vote on the bill) due to the way Eggers and Spirling (2014a) code the variable, all results are robust to using party affiliation in 1880 (please see the Appendix for additional details).

[11] The Hansard (n.d.) indicates 116 ayes and 33 nos. I have been unable to account for this one-vote discrepency in both categories between the Hansard and the data of Eggers and Spirling (2014a).

[12] A total of 151 votes when there were 652 MPs (636 currently sitting) at the time may seem exceedingly low. While it is somewhat low, it is not abnormal for the time period — in 1871, between 100 and 199 MPs voted in 26.5% of divisions, while in 1887, the corresponding figure is 23.8% (Rush 2001, 147).

my purposes is the source of the information on peerages, baronetcies, and knighthoods.[13] Finally, data on parliamentary offices comes from Eggers and Spirling (2014a).[14]

I use this data to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. While the average rate of turnover in the House of Commons between 1874 and 1900 was 42.1%, in 1885 (the first election after the Redistribution of Seats Act took effect), turnover reached a high for that period of 60.6% (Rush 2001; see also, Evans 2000). Of the 117 MPs that voted in favor of the reform at the Third Reading division, 36 (or 30.8%) both ran in the next election and lost, while 63 (or 53.8%) won in 1885 (figures calculated by the author using data from Eggers and Spirling 2014a). In particular, I focus on rewards and compensation by the Liberal Party. The reason is that the Conservatives expected to benefit from the reform, meaning that any Conservative MPs who voted in favor of it were doing so with the expectation of benefiting and thus, should be less likely to have needed an inducement to support the bill.

Thus, I analyze whether or not Liberal MPs who voted in favor of the reform were more likely (relative to other Liberal MPs) to receive compensation in the form of (new) peerages, baronetcies, or knighthoods or rewards in the form of cabinet positions or parliamentary offices. While I conduct some analyses with the full sample of Liberal MPs, I then focus on whether, among those who ran and lost in 1885, those who supported the reform were more likely to receive new peerages, baronetcies, or knighthoods and whether, among those who won in 1885, those who supported the reform were more likely to receive new appointments to parliamentary offices. The dependent variables are indicators for receiving one of these appointments following the passage of the Redistribution of Seats Act — *New Peerage*, *New Baronetcy or Knighthood*[15], *Cabinet Member*, and *Office Holder* (the latter includes cabinet positions, but also non-cabinet parliamentary offices). My coding of both *Cabinet Member* and *Office Holder* adjusts that of Eggers and Spirling (2014a) to exclude offices that were

---

[13] Although there is some missing information about the dates of knighthood and baronetcy appointments that I supplement with secondary sources.

[14] The Appendix provides additional details about the data and descriptive statistics.

[15] I group knighthoods and baronetcies because they are grouped in the original data source (Rush 2001), presumably because baronetcies are hereditary knighthoods.

exclusively held by peers or that are determined by seniority rather than appointment.

I use linear probability models for ease of interpretation. The results presented here consider appointments made in 1886 (in other words, within roughly a year of the reform).[16] I focus on appointments within a year because this allows sufficient time for the appointment to occur (for example, in the case of a knighthood, to allow for the time it takes to recommend the appointment to the monarch and for that decoration to be conferred), while also keeping in mind that if compensation or rewards for support are given, they are likely to occur relatively quickly after 1885 (the party leadership has a long time horizon, but within limits). I specifically use the one-year cutoff rather than other possible cutoffs (e.g., two or three years) because the Liberals were out of power between mid-1886 and 1892, severely restricting their ability to make appointments. Moreover, the Liberals and Conservatives were each in power for roughly 6 months in 1886 meaning that each party would have had the opportunity to make appointments to both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary positions that year.[17] That said, if anything, using 1886 alone is an underestimate of the true extent of appointments because it is possible that compensation and rewards were given in 1885 after the Redistribution of Seats Bill passed. However, as I have only the year of the appointments and not the exact date, I exclude any 1885 appointments since I cannot confirm they occurred after the Third Reading.

The independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether or not the individual voted in favor of the Redistribution of Seats Act at the Third Reading — *Support.* I code *Support* as one if the individual voted in favor of the bill and zero if they either voted against or abstained. Since the analysis is limited to Liberal MPs, in practice, *Support* captures whether an MP supported the bill or abstained as no Liberal MPs voted against the bill. However, coding the variable in this way should, if anything, bias against finding results (increasing confidence in results I do find) because even those who abstained in the

---

[16] Although the results are similar if one considers appointments within five years of 1885 (coded as appointments between 1886 and 1890, inclusive).

[17] That the Conservatives could also make appointments in 1886 will be important for placebo tests which I discuss below.

Third Reading division may have voted in favor of the reform in other votes on the bill. This means that there may be some MPs in my data who are coded as abstainers, but who, at other times, voted in favor of the reform and thus, who the party may need to compensate.

I also include a variety of controls. First, I control for whether an individual held a cabinet position at the time of the Third Reading. One would expect cabinet ministers to both be more likely to vote in support of a government bill and more likely to receive appointments — in particular, peerages after leaving parliament and other cabinet positions or offices while still in the Commons. While I present the results controlling for those who were cabinet ministers at the time the vote was taken, the results are generally robust to instead using a control for whether an individual was a cabinet minister at any time prior to the vote on the Redistribution of Seats Bill. Second, I use a series of dummy variables to control for the occupation of the MP when they entered parliament and their level of education because it is possible that the party only compensated or rewarded those members who had relatively poor outside options (and it is also possible that the quality of outside options affected an MP's willingness to support a bill that might cost him his seat). Moreover, controlling for occupation also controls for whether an individual was a military officer (at least at the time they entered parliament) which should be a particularly important predictor of honors and decorations. Additionally, I control for whether the MP had an aristocratic connection. This variable is coded as one if the MP is the son of a peer or baronet and zero otherwise. Note that this does not necessarily mean the MP would stand to inherit the title (as the MP could be a younger son). However, this type of connection may affect the likelihood the individual is given an appointment (particularly a peerage) as well as their willingness to support a bill that would damage their reelection prospects (as this can be thought of as another measure of their outside options). Finally, I control for the individual's age in 1885. Those who are older may have a longer period of service to the party and in parliament which might affect the likelihood they would receive an appointment upon leaving office or a parliamentary office while in the Commons. Age may also affect one's willingness to support the reform

(e.g., if I am planning to retire in the near future anyway, I may be more likely to support the reform regardless of any inducements offered by the party).[18]

Analysis

Table 1 shows the correlation between supporting the Redistribution of Seats Bill at the Third Reading (*Support*) and receiving a peerage (*New Peerage*) or a baronetcy or knighthood (*New Baronetcy or Knighthood*) in 1886. These models include only those who were members of the Liberal Party in 1885 since it is this group who would have been expected to be harmed by the passage of the bill and who we would therefore expect to be compensated.[19]

I expect those who vote in favor of the Redistribution of Seats Bill should be more likely to receive a peerage, baronetcy, or knighthood than those who abstain. As columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 shows, those who supported the bill at the Third Reading were more likely to receive a peerage in 1886. Specifically, the results indicate that Liberal MPs who support the bill at the Third Reading are approximately 4% more likely to receive a peerage in the following year than those who abstained. While this may seem like a small effect, only 43 individuals who served as members of Parliament at the time of the Third Reading were awarded a peerage in the subsequent twenty years, across all parties. Indeed, in some ways appointments to peerages are a particularly hard test of the theory since peers are entitled to sit in the House of Lords (and therefore could no longer be elected to the House of Commons in the future).[20]

As columns 3 and 4 of Table 1 show, I find no evidence that supporting the Redistribution of Seats Bill at the Third Reading is correlated with receiving a new baronetcy or knighthood in the following year. While contrary to expectations, this suggests that these types of honors

---

[18] I do not control for whether the individual won in the 1885 election (even though that clearly ought to predict appointments) because it would be post-treatment to *Support*.

[19] I restrict the analysis to those who are coded as Liberals by Eggers and Spirling (2014a), excluding those coded as members of Liberal-affiliated parties. The results are often stronger if a more expansive coding rule is used, but in the years following 1885, some of these affiliated groups broke away from the Liberal party.

[20] Recall, because peerages are primarily hereditary at this time, I only count appointments to new hereditary peerages, not those who inherited their title.

Table 1: Support for Redistribution of Seats and New Peerages, Kighthoods, and Baronetcies Among Liberal MPs

| | _Dependent variable:_ | | | |
| | New Peerage | | New Baronetcy or Knighthood | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	0.035**	0.040*	−0.019	−0.023
	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.023)
Constant	0.006	−0.005	0.029**	−0.028
	(0.010)	(0.068)	(0.011)	(0.068)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	270	212	270	212
R^2	0.016	0.054	0.004	0.031

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (at third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

and decorations are deployed differently (at least in this time period). While knighthoods and baronetcies confer prestige, peerages confer both (even greater) prestige and a continued role in parliament as a member of the House of Lords. In other words, peerages also confer continued policy influence. It is noteworthy that it appears compensation takes a form that allows for a continued role in government. Overall, the results in Table 1 suggest that those who supported the party even when doing so was expected to weaken their chances of reelection are compensated by the party for their loyalty with peerages in the year immediately following the reform, but not with knighthoods or baronetcies.

Knighthoods, baronetcies, and particularly peerages are attractive ways to compensate MPs who did not win reelection because they do not require that the individual is sitting in the House of Commons (and in the case of peerages, precludes maintaining a seat in the Commons). However, theoretically, all Liberal MPs were in danger of losing their seats at the election and thus may have needed an incentive to support the Redistribution of Seats. Those who supported the bill and won the 1885 election may still have been rewarded for their loyalty. This reward could have taken the form of knighthoods or baronetcies

(although the results above suggest that was not used as a reward regardless of one's fate in the 1885 election), but it might also have taken the form of offices within parliament. Table 2 shows the correlation between support for the bill and subsequently receiving a cabinet position (*Cabinet Member*) or parliamentary office more generally (*Office Holder*). Again, only members of the Liberal Party in 1885 are included.

Table 2 provides some evidence that individuals were rewarded with parliamentary offices if they supported the Redistribution of Seats. While the coefficient on *Support* is not always statistically significant, the direction is consistent across all models. Unsurprisingly, by far the largest predictor of cabinet membership or parliamentary office in the year after the vote is being a member of the cabinet at the time of the Third Reading (coefficients omitted due to space constraints). Additionally, these models consider appointments to these positions regardless of whether or not one was still in parliament after 1885 which likely artificially inflates the number of zeros in the dependent variables. Further, only 24 individuals received a cabinet appointment in 1886 across all parties (only 10 Liberals) making this a particularly hard test of the theory. Despite these limitations, appointment to parliamentary offices (which includes cabinet positions) is correlated with support for the Redistribution of Seats in the model without controls, providing tentative evidence that this is a form of reward for loyalty to the party despite the risks this bill posed to their future.

The correlation between *Support* and subsequent appointments to new peerages, baronetcies, knighthoods, and parliamentary offices demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2 is suggestive evidence that legislators were compensated and rewarded for supporting a bill that had the potential to cause them to lose their seats. However, those results consider all Liberal Party members, while the theory suggests that the particular rewards given should depend on one's fate in the 1885 election. Those who did in fact legislate themselves out of office — those who ran and lost in the 1885 election — should be most likely to receive compensation in the form of peerages, baronetcies, and knighthoods while those who held on to their seats in 1885 should be more likely to be rewarded within parliament.

Table 2: Support for Redistribution of Seats and Parliamentary Office Among Liberal MPs

	Dependent variable:			
	Cabinet Member		Office Holder	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	0.022	0.019	0.098**	0.063
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.041)	(0.048)
Constant	0.029**	−0.037	0.087***	0.309**
	(0.014)	(0.078)	(0.025)	(0.143)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	270	212	269	211
R^2	0.003	0.354	0.021	0.223

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (at third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Therefore, Table 3 shows the results of regressing indicators for new appointments to peerages, baronetcies, and knighthoods on a restricted sample — Liberal MPs who ran for reelection in 1885 and lost. I exclude those who chose not to run in 1885. While some of those who chose not to run may have been ready to retire for reasons entirely unrelated to the Redistribution of Seats, others may have felt forced to retire early due to the reform. However, because there is no way to separate these two groups of retirees, I consider compensation only for those who ran and lost. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 show the correlation between *Support* and *New Peerage* in the subsequent year. Columns 3 and 4 show the correlation between *Support* and *New Baronetcy or Knighthood* in 1886.

Table 3 provides partial support for Hypothesis 1. The coefficient on *Support* is only significant when considering appointments to peerages, however in this sample, it falls below significance when full controls are included. However, it is possible that the large drop in sample size both when only those who ran and lost are considered and again when controls are added could account for the decrease in the precision of the estimates. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that among those who ran and lost in the 1885 election, individuals

Table 3: Support for Redistribution of Seats and Appointments Among Liberals Who Ran and Lost in 1885

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
| | New Peerage | | New Baronetcy or Knighthood | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	0.057*	0.067	−0.021	−0.036
	(0.034)	(0.045)	(0.024)	(0.033)
Constant	−0.000	−0.076	0.021	0.025
	(0.022)	(0.150)	(0.016)	(0.111)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	83	68	83	68
R^2	0.034	0.132	0.009	0.062

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (at third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

who supported the Redistribution of Seats Bill at the Third Reading are approximately 6% more likely to receive a peerage in the subsequent year than those who abstained. As with the full sample of all Liberal MPs, columns 3 and 4 suggest that knighthoods and baronetcies were not used as a form of compensation. Once again, it appears that the primary way those who legislated themselves out of office were compensated allowed them to play a continued role in governing — through a peerage and seat in the House of Lords.

Table 4 further explores the intuition that the inducement to support the Redistribution of Seats may have resulted in different types of appointments for different categories of MPs. Here, I consider appointments to cabinet positions or any parliamentary offices only among those Liberal MPs who won the 1885 election. As above, columns 1 and 2 show the results of regressing appointment as a *Cabinet Member* in 1886 on *Support*, while columns 3 and 4 show the results when *Office Holder* is used as the dependent variable.

Although the coefficient on *Support* never achieves significance, the direction of the coefficient is generally consistent across models and consistent with Hypothesis 2 that among Liberals who ran in 1885 and won, those who supported the reform are more likely to be

Table 4: Support for Redistribution of Seats and Parliamentary Office Among Liberals Who Won in 1885

	Dependent variable:			
	Cabinet Member		Office Holder	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	0.017	−0.009	0.145	0.096
	(0.054)	(0.061)	(0.089)	(0.100)
Constant	0.070*	−0.093	0.211***	0.663**
	(0.036)	(0.196)	(0.059)	(0.323)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	103	78	102	77
R^2	0.001	0.422	0.026	0.359

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (at third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$

rewarded with an appointment than those who did not. Again, the strongest predictor of holding a cabinet position or any parliamentary office is being a member of the cabinet at the time of the Third Reading (coefficient omitted). In addition to the reduced sample size and small number of cabinet positions, another possible explanation for the lack of significant results is that, while I consider one's fate in the 1885 election, there was another election in 1886. Thus, it is possible that some MPs included in this sample lost their seats in 1886 and therefore were not actually in parliament to receive these appointments, thus inflating the number of zeros in the dependent variable. Unfortunately, the lack of precision in the estimates, possibly due to one or all of these factors, precludes strong conclusions on the basis of these results.

Robustness Tests

The evidence presented thus far suggests that Liberal MPs who supported the Redistribution of Seats Bill at the Third Reading were more likely to receive peerages and parliamentary

offices in the subsequent year, however the results are weaker when 1885 election winners are separated from those who ran and lost in 1885. I argue that appointments serve as an inducement from the party to vote in favor of a bill that reduced the chances of reelection for all Liberal MPs (and compensation if one did lose their seat). However, there is no way to observe offers of rewards or compensation. Given that, how can we be sure the appointments observed above are really a form of compensation or reward for support on *this bill*?

To explore this question, I use a series of placebo tests to estimate the correlation between support for the Redistribution of Seats Bill and appointments among those who should not have needed an inducement to support the bill — Conservative MPs. Indications that *Support* and subsequent appointments are correlated in these analyses would suggest that the main results were picking up something other than evidence of a reward for supporting this particular bill.

Recall that although the bill was proposed by the Liberal Government, the redistribution of seats was actually a way to satisfy the Conservative Party in order to induce Conservatives in the House of Lords to agree to the extension of the franchise the previous year. Moreover, the Redistribution of Seats Bill was expected to benefit the Conservatives and therefore their MPs should be less likely to need appointments as a way to induce support in the vote. Since I am unable to track behind-the-scenes promises of compensation for Liberal MPs, if support on the bill is *not* correlated with appointments for Conservatives, that increases confidence that these appointments are serving as a reward or compensation for the Liberal Party.

Table 5 shows the results of models analogous to the baseline models in Table 1. Once again, *New Peerage* and *New Baronetcy or Knighthood* appointments in 1886 are regressed on an indicator for *Support* on the Third Reading of the bill and the results of linear probability models are shown. Interestingly, unlike the Liberals who expected this bill to disadvantage them, there were some Conservatives who voted against bill. Thus, in this case, *Support* equals one if the individual voted in favor of the bill and zero if they either voted no or abstained. Further, because the Conservatives were the opposition at the time and I do not

Table 5: Support for Redistribution of Seats and New Peerages, Kighthoods, and Baronetcies Among Conservatives

	Dependent variable:			
	New Peerage		New Baronetcy or Knighthood	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	−0.013	−0.015	−0.030	−0.025
	(0.046)	(0.048)	(0.069)	(0.076)
Constant	0.013*	0.022	0.030***	0.121
	(0.007)	(0.063)	(0.011)	(0.099)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	243	216	243	216
R^2	0.0003	0.238	0.001	0.054

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (any time before third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

have data on membership of the opposition frontbench (i.e., the shadow cabinet), in these models, I use an indicator for whether the individual was in cabinet at any time *before* the Third Reading (rather than the control for cabinet member at the time of the vote that I use for the analyses with the Liberal Party).

The results in Table 5 show there is no correlation between *Support* for the reform and appointments to a *New Peerage* or *New Baronetcy or Knighthood* among Conservative MPs. In fact, the coefficients on *Support*, while not significant, are consistently negative. As expected, among Conservative MPs who should not have needed any compensation, there is no evidence that their vote on this bill is correlated with subsequent grants of peerages, baronetcies, or knighthoods. This increases confidence that new peerage appointments are significantly related to support on this bill for Liberal MPs because these MPs were compensated for their willingness to risk legislating themselves out of office.[21]

Table 6 presents an analysis analogous to that in Table 2. Here, I explore whether support

---

[21] Unfortunately, it is not possible to consider appointments to new peerages, baronetcies, or knighthoods, only among Conservatives who ran and lost in 1885 (analogously to the analysis in Table 3) because there is no variation in *Support* for that group.

Table 6: Support for Redistribution of Seats and Parliamentary Office Among Conservatives

| | Dependent variable: | | | |
| | Cabinet Member | | Office Holder | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Support	0.112	0.171**	0.023	0.025
	(0.096)	(0.081)	(0.146)	(0.141)
Constant	0.055***	0.109	0.143***	0.634***
	(0.015)	(0.106)	(0.023)	(0.184)
Controls	no	yes	no	yes
Observations	243	216	243	216
R^2	0.006	0.483	0.0001	0.303

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from linear probability models. Controls include cabinet member (any time before third reading), level of education, occupation when the MP entered parliament, aristocratic connection, and age. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

for reform is correlated with appointments to the cabinet or parliamentary office more broadly in the subsequent year. In addition to the sample, the only differences between this analysis and that in Table 2 are the slightly altered coding of *Support* and the alternative measure of whether one was a cabinet member at any time prior to the vote used as a control, as discussed above. With the exception of one model in which the coefficient on *Support* is significant, the results in Table 6 generally support the intuition that Conservatives did not need an inducement for supporting the Redistribution of Seats Bill since it was expected to benefit them and therefore they were not rewarded in the subsequent year. Moreover, if one considers only Conservatives who *won* in 1885 (i.e., the sample analogous to that in Table 4), *Support* is never correlated with cabinet appointments or appointments to parliamentary offices.[22] This further increases confidence that Conservatives were not rewarded for supporting the Redistribution of Seats Bill in the same way the Liberals were.

---

[22] See replication materials for the results.

Conclusion

Due to a focus on seat maximization incentives and frameworks that treat parties as unitary actors, the electoral reform literature has traditionally (with some notable exceptions, e.g., Cox, Fiva, and Smith 2019; Gandhi, Heller, and Reuter 2020; McElwain 2008; Remington and Smith 1996) overlooked intra-party dynamics that affect the ability of parties to pass reform through the legislature. Thus, as a whole, the literature rarely addresses cases in which electoral reforms pass that do not increase the seat share of the party overall and/or harm the electoral prospects of some legislators or in which electoral reforms that would increase the party's seat share fail to pass due to revolts by backbenchers. In this paper, I relax the unitary-party assumption and consider what affects party backbenchers' support for electoral reform. In particular, why would legislators support reform that they believe may cost them their seat, effectively legislating themselves out of office?

While the party discipline literature recognizes that party leaders have a variety of "carrots and sticks" they can use to induce legislators to fall in line (e.g., Benedetto and Hix 2007; Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Cheibub 2007; Cox 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Kam 2009), some of these inducements and threats are ineffective in the context of an electoral reform that legislators believe will cause them to lose their seat. I argue that similar carrots that do not require the recipient to hold elected office can still be used to induce support for electoral reform. In particular, I argue that backbenchers will be more willing to support reform that damages their electoral chances if they believe they will be provided with patronage in the form of extra-parliamentary appointments or support in the event they lose their seats and possibly rewards in parliament if they are able to retain their seats despite the risks posed by the reform.

Using the case of the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act in the UK, I have shown that those who supported the bill are more likely receive peerages in the year immediately following the reform and that there is some evidence those who supported the reform are more

likely to be rewarded with parliamentary offices after the reform as well. While the lack of strong evidence in favor of the hypothesis that among Liberals who won in 1885, those who supported the bill at the Third Reading are more likely to receive parliamentary offices is somewhat unexpected, it does suggest an interesting alternative interpretation of the results. In the theory, I focused on the fact that, due to the relatively uniform risk faced by all Liberal MPs, they would all be equally likely to require additional inducements to support the reform. This led to the expectation that both those who won and lost in the next election would be rewarded for their support, but that the form of the reward would differ. In contrast, the results are consistent with "carrots" offered by the party leadership to compensate MPs, but only in the event they lose the election. In other words, while the inducement may be offered prior to the election, the realization of it may be contingent on the outcome of the election and reserved for those who were in fact harmed by the reform.

While I leverage data from the UK to test the theory, I believe it is more widely applicable. I ground the hypotheses in the case because the specific form compensation and rewards take may depend on the case, but the general mechanism and theory that individual legislators may need to be induced to support reform and that these inducements may include compensation outside the legislature applies across contexts. Other possible forms of compensation or rewards besides those studied here might include additional financial transfers to aid imperiled candidates in the election following reform, diplomatic appointments, appointments to positions within the party (either that do not require one to simultaneously hold an elected position as compensation for a loss or that do require elected office in the case of rewards for those who manage to retain their seats despite the risks posed by the reform), or even appointments to executive branch positions in presidential systems if the wider party is sufficiently strong to offer such an inducement. Future studies should explore these additional methods of compensation and reward in other contexts beyond the UK.

Finally, returning to the motivating examples that intra-party politics matter for electoral reform — the failure of reforms in Japan and Russia — the present analysis also raises a new

question. Why are party leaders in some cases unable or unwilling to use inducements to ensure backbenchers support reforms favored by the leadership? One possible explanation is that other systems have fewer options for compensating members who lose their seats and are more reliant on inducements within the legislature. Future work exploring this question can improve our understanding of both party discipline and electoral reform.

References

Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Benedetto, Giacomo, and Simon Hix. 2007. "The rejected, the ejected, and the dejected: Explaining government rebels in the 2001-2005 British House of Commons". *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (7): 755–780.

Benoit, Kenneth. 2004. "Models of electoral system change". *Electoral Studies* 23:363–389.

— . 2007. "Electoral Laws as Political Consequences: Explaining the Origins and Change of Electoral Institutions". *Annual Review of Political Science* 10:363–390.

Benoit, Kenneth, and Jacqueline Hayden. 2004. "Institutional Change and Persistence: The Evolution of Poland's Electoral System, 1989–2001". *Journal of Politics* 66 (2): 396–427.

Benoit, Kenneth, and John W. Schiemann. 2001. "Institutional Choice in New Democracies: Bargaining Over Hungary's 1989 Electoral Law". *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 13 (2): 153–182.

Birch, Sarah, et al. 2002. *Embodying Democracy: Electoral System Design in Post-Communist Europe.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bogdanor, Vernon. 1981. *The People and the Party System: The Referendum and Electoral Reform in British Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boix, Carles. 1999. "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies". *The American Political Science Review* 93 (3): 609–624.

Bowler, Shaun, David M. Farrell, and Richard S. Katz. 1999. "Party Cohesion, Party Discipline, and Parliaments". In *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government*, ed. by Shaun Bowler, David M. Farrell, and Richard S. Katz, 3–22. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Butler, D.E. 1963. *The Electoral System in Britain SInce 1918.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Carstairs, Andrew McLauren. 1980. *A Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe.* London: George Allen / Unwin Ltd.

Cheibub, José Antonio. 2007. *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Colomer, Josep M. 2004. "The Strategy and History of Electoral System Choice". In *Handbook of Electoral System Choice*, ed. by Josep M Colomer, 3–78. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Colomer, Josep M. 2005. "It's Parties That Choose Electoral Systems (or, Duverger's Laws Upside Down)". *Political Studies* 53 (1): 1–21.

Cox, Gary W. 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the development of political parties in Victorian England.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cox, Gary W., Jon H. Fiva, and Daniel M. Smith. 2019. "Parties, Legislators, and the Origins of Proportional Representation". *Comparative Political Studies* 52 (1): 102–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018762369.

Cox, Gary W., and James W. III Ingram. 1992. "Suffrage Expansion and Legislative Behavior in Nineteenth-Century Britain". *Social Science History* 16 (4): 539–560.

Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dunbabin, J.P.D. 1988. "Electoral Reforms and their Outcome in the United Kingdom, 1865-1900". In *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900*, ed. by T.R. Gourvish and Alan O'Day, 93–125. Hampshire: MacMillan Education LTD.

Duverger, Maurice. 1963. *Political Parties Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State.* Science Ed. Translated by Barbara and Robert North. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Eggers, Andrew C., and Arthur Spirling. 2014a. "Electoral Security as a Determinant of Legislator Activity, 1832-1918: New Data and Methods for Analyzing British Political Development". *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 39 (4): 593–620.

— . 2014b. "Party Cohesion in Westminster Systems: Inducements, Replacement and Discipline in the House of Commons, 1836-1910". *British Journal of Political Science* 46 (3): 567–589.

Evans, Eric J. 2000. *Parliamentary Reform, c. 1770-1918.* New York: Pearson Education Inc.

Gandhi, Jennifer, Abigail L Heller, and Ora John Reuter. 2020. "Shoring up Power: Electoral Reform and the Consolidation of Authoritarian Rule". *Working Paper.*

Gay, Oonagh. 2010. *The Rules for the Redistribution of Seats- history and reform.* Tech. rep. London.

Guttsman, W.L. 1963. *The British Political Elite.* London: MacGibbon / Kee.

Hansard. *House of Commons Hansard.* Visited on 04/12/2016. http://hansard.millbank systems.com/commons/.

Hart, Jenifer. 1992. *Proportional Representation: Critics of the British Electoral System 1820-1945.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hawkins, Angus. 1998. *British Party Politics, 1852-1886.* New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

Hicken, Allen. 2009. *Building Party Systems in Developing Democracies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Higashijima, Masaaki, and Eric C. C. Chang. 2016. "The Choice of Electoral Systems in Dictatorships".

Kam, Christopher J. 2009. *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaminski, Marek M. 2002. "Do Parties Benefit from Electoral Manipulation? Electoral Laws and Heresthetics in Poland, 1989-93". *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 14 (3): 325–358.

Laver, Michael, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 1999. "How Political Parties Emerged from the Primeval Slime: Party Cohesion, Party Discipline, and the Formation of Governments". In *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government*, ed. by Shaun Bowler, David M. Farrell, and Richard S. Katz, 23–48. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Lust-Okar, Ellen, and Amaney Ahmad Jamal. 2002. "Rulers and Rules: Reassessing the Influence of Regime Type on Electoral Law Formation". *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (3): 337–366.

Mackie, Colin. 2017. *A Directory of British Diplomats*. Visited on 06/06/2017. http://www.gulabin.com/britishdiplomatsdirectory/pdf/britishdiplomatsdirectory.pdf.

Mason, Roger. 2015. *The Struggle for Democracy: Parliamentary Reform, From Rotten Boroughs to Today*. Gloucestershire: The History Press.

McElwain, Kenneth Mori. 2008. "Manipulating Electoral Rules to Manufacture Single-Party Dominance". *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 32–47.

Parry, Keith. 2012. *Constitutional change: timeline from 1911: House of Commons Background Paper*. London.

Remington, Thomas F., and Steven S. Smith. 1996. "Political Goals, Institutional Context, and the Choice of an Electoral System: The Russian Parliamentary Election Law". *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (4): 1253–1279.

Rush, Michael. 2001. *The Role of the Member of Parliament Since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Uberoi, Elise, and Isobel White. 2015. *Constituency boundary reviews and the number of MPs*. London.

Appendix A   Data and Descriptive Statistics

Here, I present additional details about the data used in the paper. Figure A-1 shows the distribution of MP party membership and occupation in the data. The left panel shows the number of MPs who were associated with each party in 1885 according to the data from Eggers and Spirling (2014a). This variable is used to identify Liberal and Conservative party members. Unfortunately, this variable is coded based on the party affiliation of MPs at the time of the 1885 election (i.e., slightly after the vote on the Redistribution of Seats Bill). While this coding is technically post-treatment, I use the 1885 party coding because it is likely that the party/faction affiliation would have been known (by both the MP and the party leadership) well in advance of the election (the vote occurred roughly six months before the election) and therefore is likely to capture the true party affiliation just prior to the vote on the Redistribution of Seats Bill. Nevertheless, all the results are robust to using the unambiguously pre-treatment coding of party affiliation at the time of the 1880 election (also from Eggers and Spirling 2014a).[1] As shown in the left panel of Figure A-1, by far the two largest parties are the Liberals (270 MPs) and the Conservatives (243 MPs).[2]

The right panel of Figure A-1 presents the distribution of MP occupations at the time the MP initially entered parliament. This variable is used as a control in the analyses. The original data for this variable came from Rush (2001), but I have condensed the information into these categories. There are 59 MPs for whom the occupation information is missing. As shown, although there was more variation in the background of MPs by this time compared to earlier in the century, there were still relatively few occupations represented in parliament.

While I use Figure A-1 to present information about the categorical variables used in the analyses, Table A-1 shows descriptive statistics for the other variables used in the paper. The

---

[1] In fact, the results of the regressions of *Office Holding* on *Support* with no controls using both the full sample of Liberals and only Liberals who won in 1885 actually improve if the 1880 coding of party is used.
[2] For the purposes of the figure, I have combined several of the smaller party classifications — two variations of Home Rulers as well as four variations of Independent Liberals that were originally separated by Eggers and Spirling (2014a).

Figure A-1: Distribution of Party and Occupation Variables
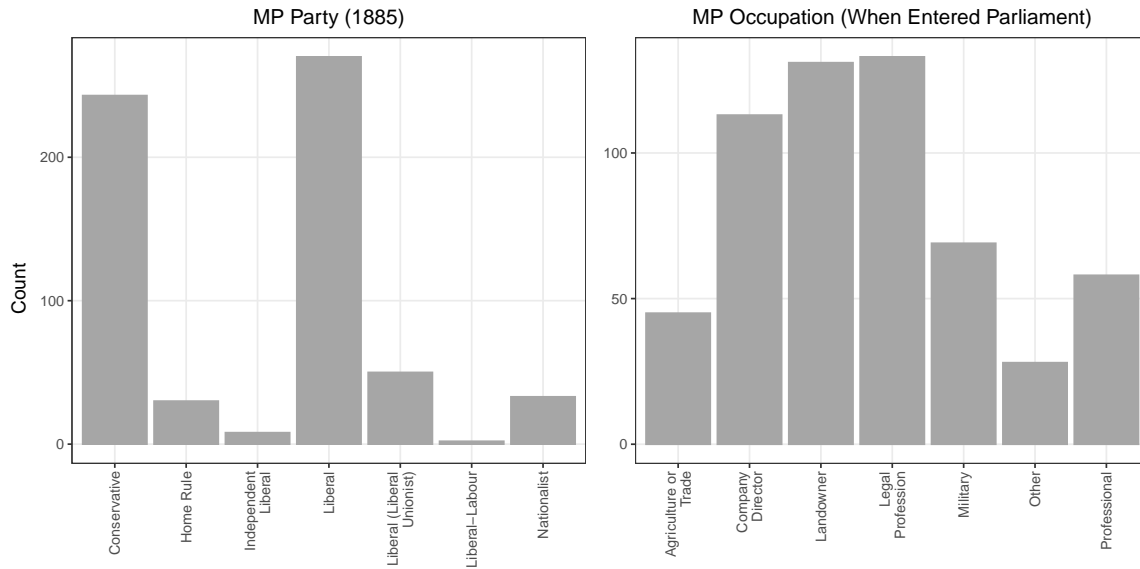
Note: The occuptation plot omits missing values (59).

top panel summarizes the dependent variables used in the analyses, all of which take a value of 1 if the MP received a new appointment to one of those positions in 1886 (the year following the reform). The data for *New Peerage* and *New Baronetcy or Knighthood*, originally come from Rush (2001). In the case of the baronetcy and knighthood data, some appointment years were missing so I used secondary sources to code those dates. The data for *Cabinet Member* and and *Office Holder* originally come from Eggers and Spirling (2014a). I used their data on office holdings by MPs to identify which individuals received an appointment to a parliamentary office or cabinet position in 1886. In addition to some minor corrections (done using secondary sources) to the office holding variables, I deviate from the original data so that I do not count either seniority positions (Father of the House) or positions which one must be a member of the House of Lords to hold so that I am more confident that these variables capture discretionary appointments to positions in the House of Commons.

The middle panel in Table A-1 summarizes the independent variable of interest in all the analyses, *Support*. This variable originally came from Eggers and Spirling (2014a), although I made a few minor corrections (to ensure that those who were listed elsewhere as not sitting

Table A-1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
New Peerage	636	0.013	0.112	0	1
New Baronetcy or Knighthood	636	0.020	0.142	0	1
Cabinet Member	636	0.038	0.191	0	1
Office Holder	631	0.113	0.316	0	1
Support	636	0.184	0.388	0	1
Cabinet Member (At 3rd Reading)	636	0.013	0.112	0	1
Cabinet (Before 3rd Reading)	636	0.031	0.175	0	1
University Graduate or Higher	536	0.610	0.488	0	1
Aristocratic Connection	636	0.286	0.452	0	1
Age	630	53.39	12.232	19	85

Note: Summary statistics for the dependent variables (top panel; all consider new appointments in 1886), independent variable of interest (middle panel), and control variables (bottom panel) used in the analyses.

at the time of the third reading, were not counted as having voted. As noted in the paper, this variable is coded as one if the MP voted in support of the Redistribution of Seats Bill at the Third Reading and a zero if they voted against or abstained.

Finally, the bottom panel in Table A-1 presents the summary statistics for the control variables used in the analyses (with the exception of occupation, shown above). Both cabinet membership control variables are from Eggers and Spirling (2014a). For the analyses using the Liberal Party subset, I use *Cabinet Member (At 3rd Reading)*, while I use *Cabinet (Before 3rd Reading)* for the analyses using the Conservative Party since Eggers and Spirling (2014a) do not have information on the Shadow Cabinet. The data for *University Graduate or Higher* originally comes from Rush (2001), but I collapsed his coding to this dichotomous variable. The data for *Aristocratic Connection* also comes from Rush (2001) and is coded as one if the MP is the son (not necessarily the eldest) of a peer or baronet and zero otherwise. Finally, I calculated the *Age* of the MP using the date of birth recorded in Eggers and Spirling (2014a). Since the month and day of birth is often estimated in the original data, I elected not to attempt to code the age of the MPs at the time of the Third Reading. Instead, for simplicity, *Age* is coded as the MP's age at the end of 1885 by subtracting their birth year from 1885.