

**A NEGLECTED ELECTORAL SYSTEM?
ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHIES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITAIN**

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by

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ABSTRACT

A Neglected Electoral System? Alternative Electoral Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Britain

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This thesis explores the electoral geography of nineteenth-century Britain. It is inspired by contemporary studies of the British electoral landscape since 1945 and the geography of campaign fund-raising and expenditure. Using the ideas and concepts developed in these studies this thesis applies these to nineteenth-century elections in a way that has never before been attempted using unique source materials. It is focused around three main themes: the geography of the electoral landscape of the nineteenth century, disproportionality and bias in the electoral system and the geographies of campaign expenditure.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the notion of Britain as a democratising nation needs to be revisited, at least with respect to the operation of its electoral system. The dominant narrative in the political and electoral historiography of the democratisation of nineteenth-century Britain remains one which is focused around the importance of the extension of the franchise and the resultant growth of the electorate, the implementation of single-member constituencies and the redistribution of seats, and the introduction of anti-corruption measures such as the secret ballot. While these undoubtedly aided the development of a more democratic political system, this thesis demonstrates that the electoral system itself still produced outcomes that were disproportional, biased and beginning to be manipulated by the major political parties; the Liberal party especially was better rewarded by the process of translating votes into seats than they should have been, and were more effective in influencing the vote through geographically targeted campaigning.

Ultimately, the thesis uses these different themes, arguments and methodologies to investigate how efficient the translation of votes into seats was in the nineteenth century, opening up new debates about the process of democratisation and political modernisation in Britain.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the electoral geography of Britain during the long nineteenth century. It is inspired by contemporary studies of the British electoral landscape since 1945 (e.g. MacAllister et al., 2002), the operation of the electoral system since World War Two (Curtice, 2001; Dunleavy and Margetts, 1998; Dunleavy et al., 1996, 1997; Johnston et al., 2001b, 2002b; Rossiter et al., 1997a, 1997b) and the geography of campaign fund-raising and expenditure (e.g. Denver and Hands, 2004; Fisher, 2001; Pattie and Johnston, 1997). Using the ideas and concepts developed in these studies this thesis sets out to apply these to nineteenth-century elections in a way that has never before been attempted using unique source materials. It is focused around three main themes: the geography of the electoral landscape of the nineteenth century, disproportionality and bias in the electoral system, and the geographies of campaign expenditure.

The Timing of the Development of the British Electoral System

The long nineteenth century (1789-1914) was a crucial era in the development of a Parliamentary democracy in Britain, with many of the features of the

modern-day liberal democracy first legislated for during this period.¹ Within it three specific dates stand out: 1832, 1867 and 1884. After very little change to the British electoral system throughout the eighteenth century, the Reform Acts introduced in each of these years saw the country gradually develop a more democratic electoral system. Each Act brought about – although to varying degrees – an extension of the franchise and a reorganisation of the constituencies to give more equal representation to all parts of the country. Further pieces of legislation during the second half of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872 and a progressive tightening of the regulations relating to campaign expenditure in an attempt to reduce the amount of corruption.

At the beginning of the long nineteenth century no Western state was democratic but by the end several, including Britain, had developed some form

¹ The term 'long nineteenth century' was coined by Eric Hobsbawm in his trilogy of studies of European history – *Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (1962), *The Age of Capital: Europe 1848-1875* (1975) and *The Age of Empire: Europe 1875-1914* (1987). The period begins with the French Revolution, which established a nonmonarchical republic in Europe, and ends with the start of World War One. Since the conclusion of this war marked the end of the European balance of power that had been established and built up during the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm argues that these events represented such significant changes in world history that they defined an era. The term has seen limited use in a British context – Daunton (2007) and Vernon (1996) are notable examples – compared to European or transnational ones (e.g. Berend, 2003; Bevir, 2001; Blom et al., 2000; Hoffmann, 2003).

of liberal democracy. A variety of general conditions combined to bring about this process of democratisation, including the emergence of industrial capitalism and mass literacy; the latter factor in particular helped to increase the power and mobilising capacity of a wider swathe of social groups than ever before to stake a claim for a share of power and control of the state (Goldblatt, 1997: 46-7).² It could be argued that in England specifically the pattern of democratisation stretched back to the creation of Parliamentary government on a very narrow franchise after the Civil War following the end of royal absolutism, or even further back to the Magna Carta. This saw the removal of considerable powers from the monarch and their transfer to an elected House of Commons and the unelected House of Lords. The ability to vote was, however, still severely restricted by property and ownership qualifications, while the electoral system was open to corruption and constituency boundaries were skewed towards rural areas. Further setbacks to the development of a more democratic Parliamentary

² There is an extensive literature attached to the concept of democratisation. Good general overviews are provided by Huntington (1991), Parry and Moran (1994), Potter et al. (1997), Sørensen (1998), Tilly (2007) and Whitehead (2002). It is a concept more usually applied to areas such as Africa (Diamond and Plattner, 1999; Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Reynolds, 1998; Sisk, 1995), Central and Eastern Europe (Birch, 2000; Dawisha and Parrott, 1997; Farkas, 2007; Kaldor and Vejevoda, 1999; Nagle and Mahr, 1999; Pravda and Zielonka, 2001; Pridham, 2005; Wiarda, 2006; Zielonka, 2001), Latin America (Hagopian and Mainwaring, 2005), the Middle East (Brynen et al., 1995, 1998) and South Asia (Reilly, 2006; Marsh et al., 1999) rather than Britain. Studies of democratisation in Britain do exist and will be discussed later in this chapter.

system were encountered during and immediately after the Napoleonic Wars, Goldblatt (1997: 50) argues, when ‘many basic civil and political liberties were effectively suspended and widespread state directed repression of the press and political opponents was conducted’.

In light of this chequered history the changes of the nineteenth century were a significant step in the direction of democracy, especially if taken at face value. The expansion of suffrage in 1832, for example, saw the upper segments of the middle classes brought within the polity, the 1867 Reform Act enfranchised a substantial electorate in the cities and boroughs, and the Third Reform Act in 1884 extended suffrage expansion to the counties. There remained, however, considerable agitation for further reform – from the Chartist movement for universal suffrage during the 1830s and 1840s for example – and the continuation of other less democratic practices, such as the untamed power of the unelected House of Lords, throughout the long nineteenth century. Indeed, it was not until 1919 that anything that approached universal adult suffrage was introduced, not all women were able to vote until 1928 and plural voting was not abolished until 1948.³

Although Britain has come to be considered as one of the first nations to develop into a liberal democracy, the drawn out, and by no means linear, nature of this process has clouded the actual chronology of democratisation. For Doyle

³ Women aged over 30 were given the vote in the 1918 Representation of the People Act; the 1928 Equal Franchise Act gave women the same voting rights as men. Plural voters were those individuals who were qualified to vote in more than one constituency. The issue of plural voting is examined in more detail in chapter seven.

(1983) and Fukuyama (1992) who adopted the standard that a liberal democracy should have a market economy and representative government, and maintain judicial rights, Britain had opened up its political systems enough to be considered democratic by 1848 at the latest.⁴ This was later than nations such as France, Switzerland and the United States, but at roughly the same time as Belgium and the Netherlands. Huntington (1991: 14-15) locates the point of democratisation slightly earlier at around 1828, before the first Reform Act in 1832. This timing placed Britain firmly in the beginning of the first of his three waves of democratisation alongside nine other nations, not all of which were those identified by Doyle or Fukuyama.⁵ His definition of democracy was also more sophisticated than theirs:

[A] political system [is] democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. ... [Democracy] also implies the existence of those civil and political freedoms to speak,

⁴ Doyle and Fukuyama also excluded all nations with populations of less than one million from their analyses. The idea that liberal democracy needs a market economy has been roundly critiqued – for example see Beetham, 1997.

⁵ Huntington identified three forward waves of democratisation (i.e. when countries became democratic) between 1828-1926, 1943-62 and from 1974 onwards. These were punctuated by two periods of reverse democratisation between 1922-42 and 1958-75 as certain nations previously classified as democratic reverted to authoritarianism (Huntingdon, 1991: 16).

publish, assemble, and organize that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns. (Huntington, 1991: 7)

A third definition of democracy – and consequently another methodology – has been adopted by Vanhanen (1984). He claims that,

In modern societies democracy means that people and groups of people are free to compete for power and that power holders are elected by the people and responsible to the people. As a consequence of free competition, political power is assumed to be widely distributed among various groups in democracies. (Vanhanen, 1984: 11)

The results of his study are based on an Index of Democratisation (ID) score.⁶ Beginning in 1850, Vanhanen calculated for each decade the ID value for each independent country that existed in 1984 with a population of over one million; this was then used to determine whether they were democracies during that decade.⁷ Using this method Vanhanen asserts that Britain did not achieve

⁶ The Index of Democratisation was a rough measurement of power sharing in electoral systems, and was defined as $ID = \text{Competition} \times \text{Participation} / 100$. Competition was calculated by subtracting the percentage of the votes won by the largest party from 100 (using whichever type of national election was more important under a given regime); participation was the percentage of the total population which actually voted.

⁷ He further classified each country in each decade as a 'New Democracy' (crossing the ID threshold into democracy for the first time in that decade); an 'Old Democracy' (a democracy that had also been one during the previous decade); a 'Dropper' (dropping below the ID threshold in that decade); a 'Re-entrant Democracy' (a former democracy crossing the ID threshold a second

democratic status until the period between 1910 and 1919, significantly later than the first countries to democratise, such as Canada, France and the United States, who had done so as early as the 1850s and 1860s. Perspectives on the timing of democratisation in Britain therefore clearly vary. While the nation was certainly moving in the direction of becoming a modern liberal democracy, for some the point of maturity was not attained until towards the end of the long nineteenth century while for others it had already been reached even before the passage of the first of the Reform Acts in 1832.

While these definitions all concentrate on representative democracy, it is important to note that there are many other types of democracy, for example the classical, Athenian model of direct democracy where citizens were directly involved in all decision making (see Held, 1996). This study, however, considers Britain to be a representative democracy (see Judge, 1999) and focuses specifically on the development of the electoral system as a part of the democratisation process.

The Historiography of the Democratisation

The development of the British electoral system has been extensively recorded and analysed from a number of viewpoints. Studies from the first 40 years of the twentieth century, such as those by Namier (1929, 1930) and Trevelyan (1922)

time); or an 'Other Non-democracy' (any non-democracy that had not 'dropped' in that decade).

adopted a Whig perspective on the development of the electoral system.⁸ In broad terms, these presented the history of the period as a story of progress towards the British constitutional settlement (irrespective of the timing of democratisation) and adopted the view that the British Parliamentary system and constitutional monarchy was the summit of human development. The subsequent critique of Whig history by Butterfield (1931), however, argued that there were a number of issues that undermined the perspective. First, by assuming that the constitutional monarchy was an ideal held through all ages, the approach developed an abridged version of British history which ignored many key inconvenient incidents, not least the numerous power struggles between various monarchs and Parliament. Second, the emphasis on the inevitability of progress led to the mistaken belief that the progressive sequence of events became 'a line of causation', resulting in the historian going no further to investigate the causes of historical change. Cannadine (1992: 197) summarises the approach as one that,

... was fiercely partisan and righteously judgmental, dividing the personnel of the past into the good and the bad. And it did so on the basis of the marked preference for liberal and progressive causes, rather than conservative and reactionary ones. [...] Whig history was, in short, an extremely biased view of the past: eager to hand out moral judgments and distorted by teleology, anachronism and present-mindedness.

⁸ This was an approach to history first espoused by Thomas Babington Macaulay in his *History of England from the Accession of James II*, first published in 1848. For further discussion of this see the introduction by Hugh T. Roper in the 1979 reprint of his work (Macaulay, 1979).

In contrast, Brent (1987) has identified a tendency among more recent studies of nineteenth-century political history to focus on the aristocratic institutions and actors of high politics, as well as to see the Reform Acts as the consequences of political manoeuvring rather than the result of pressure from outside of Westminster (for example: Bentley, 1999). As Vernon (1993: 2) states, '[i]n these accounts it is the political forces of Conservative reaction, not the triumphs of Liberal public opinion, which are brought to the fore'. Because of this Moore (1976), for example, presents the First Reform Act as an attempt to reassert aristocratic electoral control over rural areas. These Tory narratives reject the Liberal notion of a continuous progression towards liberal democracy, instead embracing a narrative where power emanates outwards from an increasingly aristocratic centre (Vernon, 1993: 2; Clark, 1985, 1986).

Other studies of the electoral geography of the period, such as Kinnear (1981) and Pelling (1967), have sought to describe patterns of electoral support during the nineteenth century whilst avoiding developing a specific analysis along Whiggish or Tory lines. In contrast, more recent studies of British political history and electoral reform have broken with the Whig tradition. Two in particular stand out: Garrard's (2002) unique and conceptually holistic study of the roles played by elites and civil society in the process of democratisation in Britain since 1800 and Vernon's (1993) provocative postmodern re-examination of the tensions between popular politics and the development of England's liberal democratic constitution between 1815 and 1867.⁹

⁹ More tangential studies of aspects of British democracy in the nineteenth century include Barrow and Bullock (1996), Biagini (1992) and Gosden (1961).

Garrard (2002) draws explicit links between conventional histories of political reform and debates about democratisation within the discipline of political science to explain the development of democracy in Britain. Beginning in 1800 and running through to the present day (and focusing predominantly on Lancashire), his account emphasises the role played by elites in managing and guiding the process of democratisation, whilst also stressing the role of an institutionalised civil society generated from below. Garrard contends that the process was the result of a mixing of the latter with popular movements, local politics and civic associations, reforms to the law, aspects of the moral and political economy, and religion. Collectively, he argues, these contributed to a gradual, inexorable progress from oligarchy to democracy over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was evolutionary in nature and which came about with a minimum of social disturbance.

The notion of progress aside, this study differs from the Whig approach in two key respects. First, it focuses on analysing the mechanisms and processes through which Britain developed into a working and durable democracy rather than emphasising the role of high politics and its actors. Garrard argues that the way in which Britain democratised was indicative of economic, political and social conditions that were fundamentally benign. Elites were not wholly resistant to permitting greater inclusion, there was general consensus about the extent of liberal freedoms, the ability of the state to repress was limited, the minimalist laissez-faire state created a space in which excluded social groups could acquire political 'fitness' through the creation of institutions of civil society, national identities were almost fully integrated into mainstream political and social structures, and the capitalist market economy reduced the potential for

events to become too contentious. Second, Garrard argues that the balance of responsibility for the process of democratisation lay not with high political actors. The success of what was an unplanned process lay in part in the staged admission of various groups – middle-class men, working-class men, and women – after they had developed democratic capacities on their own, particularly through the creation and perpetuation of their own civic organisations. Since he argues that some sections of each group gained full political rights before others, it is clear that for Garrard the process of democratisation in Britain was not one that was accomplished by a specified date but instead was very much an ongoing project.

Vernon (1993) offers a very different interpretation of the process of democratisation and its outcomes, although he still claims to break with ‘the current narratives of nineteenth-century political history, with their triumphalist accounts of the development of England’s democratic and libertarian constitution’ (Vernon, 1993: 1).¹⁰ Based on evidence drawn from five different Parliamentary constituencies (Boston, Lewes, Oldham, South Devon and Tower Hamlets), Vernon claims that by the start of the nineteenth century England already possessed a recognisably national political culture. This is seen to manifest itself through the relationship between popular cultures and party politics, usually expressed either visually or orally, through civic and electoral

¹⁰ As an example of a cultural turn history, Vernon’s work has attracted some criticism from those opposed to the role of postmodern narratives in historical analysis. See, for example, Stone (1991); also, Jenkins (1997) and Joyce (1998).

rituals, oratory and ballads, and cartoons and printed handbills.¹¹ However, he argues, this did not continue in existence through the rest of the century for three reasons, the first two of which are directly applicable to the notion of Britain as a democratising nation during the nineteenth century. Firstly, the extension of formal democratic rights during the nineteenth century coincided with the gradual ‘closure’ of popular politics; secondly, ‘the invention of party’ both depended upon this political closure and completed the process of ‘disciplining’ popular politics; and, thirdly, ‘popular constitutionalism’ – with its emphasis on the historic liberties of the ‘free-born Englishman’ – represented the ‘master narrative’ of nineteenth-century English politics.

Vernon draws heavily on the work of both Vincent (1981, 1989) and Thompson (1968) in his discussion of the ‘closure’ of popular politics. His main argument here is that political reforms such as the various anti-corruption laws that were introduced over the course of the nineteenth century or the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872 were not initiatives aimed at improving the standard of democracy. Rather than being concerned with facilitating participation in the public political sphere, they were instead intended to restrict this. Legislation against corrupt practices was intended to not just reduce the high level of illegal expenditure at elections, but also to control the production and dissemination of street literature. In a similar vein, the secret ballot was introduced to complete the exclusion of non-voters from the public political sphere rather than breaking the coercive influence of social elites. The invention of the party is also seen as having negative consequences since it brought

¹¹ Similar evidence is presented by, among others, Garrard (1977) and Lawrence (1993).

discipline and regulation – the implementation of ticketing at public meetings, for example – which, Vernon argues, were traits that strangled popular politics; such an argument clearly challenges the traditional view of the integrative, emancipator role of political parties after 1867 (see Lawrence, 1992a). Overall Vernon develops a counter-narrative which stresses that movement in a seemingly more democratic direction was actually being reversed through the increasing restrictions of the public political sphere.

The idea of critically examining the development of democracy and more specifically the electoral system in Britain is, however, still relatively novel, the studies of Garrard and Vernon aside. This contrasts sharply with the post World War Two period when a range of disciplines, including political science and geography, have provided in depth analyses of a wide range of different aspects of party politics and electoral behaviour. In a purely British context these can be grouped into several broad categories, each headed by a number of key studies: studies of determinants of party choice such as class, age, gender and religion (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Butler and Stokes, 1969, 1974; Rose and McAllister, 1990); of dealignment – the process whereby large sections of the electorate switch party allegiance – and its causes and consequences (Crewe, 1984; Crewe et al., 1977; Miller et al., 1986); issue voting (Butler and Stokes, 1974; Crewe, 1981, 1985, 1992; Heath et al., 1985; Rose and McAllister, 1990); of campaigning and the mass media (Kavanagh, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997; Bartle and Griffiths, 2001); and, finally, of various aspects of electoral behaviour and geography such as tactical voting (Curtice and Steed, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; Niemi et al., 1992), turnout (Clarke et al., 2004; Heath and Taylor, 1999; Whiteley et al., 2001; Heath et al., 1999),

constituency campaigns and their impact (Bochel and Denver, 1972; Pattie et al., 1995; Seyd and Whiteley, 2002; Denver and Hands, 2004; Clarke et al., 2004), and the operation of the electoral system (Johnston et al., 2001b).

None of these are themes that a politician or political commentator of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries would recognise since these postwar studies pay relatively little attention to party policies, personalities, topical events or political issues (Denver, 2003: 95). The same can be said for modern studies of the nineteenth-century electoral system and it is in this key respect that this study differs. In a similar manner to Garrard, it seeks to take some of the wider concepts elaborated in postwar studies and apply them to nineteenth-century elections in order to examine a still evolving electoral system.

Additionally, rather than accepting the idea that Britain was inexorably moving towards possessing a system that was increasingly democratic both in terms of who it included and the outcomes it produced, as studies of this period tend to suggest, this thesis instead considers whether the electoral system was still producing outcomes that became more, rather than less, unequal over time. In this way this thesis contributes to both electoral geography and critical historical geography by applying contemporary theories to a historical case-study and by analysing the electoral development of Britain in a new, more spatialised manner.

Methodology and Source Material

In order to do this, this thesis uses two specially constructed original data sets; all analysis in this thesis is based on data drawn from these unless otherwise

specifically noted. The first contains the electorate size and results of every contested constituency at each general election between 1832, the first contest after the reforms of the First Reform Act, and December 1910, the final poll before the outbreak of World War One. This Constituency Results Database is based mainly on the tabulations provided by Craig (1974; 1977), but with the results and, in particular, the electorate sizes for each individual constituency checked against those provided in McCalmont (1971) and through the reporting of election results to Parliament in Parliamentary Papers. Altogether over the course of the twenty general elections during this period this data set amounts to almost 470,000 individual variables; a sample of this database is contained in Appendix A.

The second dataset contains the election expenses of every candidate at each general election between 1885 and 1900 in the county constituencies of England and Wales. This is the first time that these returns have been computerised and systematically analysed; a sample of the Election Expenditure Database, which in its entirety contains nearly 60,000 variables, can be found in Appendix B. These have been compiled from the returns that candidates were legally required to provide by the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act.¹²

The source material this second database draws on has a particularly interesting history and demonstrates how electoral practices evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. Up until 1883 – termed the aristocratic era by Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 15) – electoral politics were characterised by both

¹² The full list of the documents used to compile this database can be found in the Primary Sources section of the bibliography.

excessive costs and high levels of bribery.¹³ The latter was common throughout the nineteenth century, and indeed before, although over time this declined. Machin (2001: 28) claims that between the First and Second Reform Acts a total of 130 petitions were presented in the House of Commons claiming that the election result in a particular constituency should be voided because of corruption, although only two-thirds of these were successful. MPs elected in 1841 were collectively known as the 'bribery Parliament' (Seymour, 1915: 174). Even higher levels of bribery, intimidation and violence were seen at the 1847 and 1852 general elections (Garrard, 2002: 261). Bribery was particularly prevalent in smaller boroughs: in 1832 850 of the 1,000 voters in the borough of Stamford received bribes (Gash, 1953: 158), while in 1850 308 of the 483 voters in St. Albans habitually took them (Gwyn, 1978: 391). By mid-century, however, continual and extensive bribery probably took place in no more than 50 boroughs, although the distinction in its incidence between the small, pre-Reform boroughs – which were commonly disenfranchised because of their corrupt nature – and larger boroughs was now more blurred than before (Gwyn, 1978: 391). In contrast to England and Wales it is generally accepted that during this period corruption was almost unknown in Scotland, where the newly created constituencies meant that voters were not tainted by corruption (Gwyn, 1978: 392).

¹³ Before the first reform act perhaps the best-known case of massive electoral expenditure was the Yorkshire contest of 1807, when the two successful candidates spent £3 million and £11 million respectively (in today's monetary values), and the losing candidate £11 million (Smith, 1967: 86).

Corrupt practices continued after the passage of the Second Reform Act. There is, however, some dispute as to their extent. While Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 15) contends they were common in at least half of all borough constituencies in England, Hanham (1978: 263) states that, 'undoubted cases of corruption occurred in at least 64 English boroughs at Parliamentary elections between 1865 and 1884', before continuing that, '[i]t is certain that corrupt practices occurred in between one-third and one-half of English boroughs on a sufficient scale for them to be noticed'. For the framers of the Second Reform Act the extension of the franchise to a new class of man was meant to dilute the ability to bribe since there would be many more voters for a candidate and his agents to reach out to. There is little evidence, however, to show that the increased size of the electorate was successful in driving down the extent of corruption. Using the case of Bridgewater as evidence (where two-thirds of the voters newly enfranchised were deemed to be corrupt), Gwyn (1978: 392) notes, '[t]he truth of the matter appears to be that, while the corrupt element in the pre-Reform electorate retained its character after Reform, in several constituencies many of the new voters eagerly grasped the spoils of election contests for which they had long hungered'.¹⁴ Compared with those that had come before, the general election of 1880 was particularly corrupt. A total of 42 election petitions were lodged afterwards, of which 16 in England were successful, leading to the temporary disenfranchisement of seven towns, with a further eight led to the appointment of Royal Commissions of Inquiry (see O'Leary, 1962; Lloyd, 1968).

¹⁴ See also King (1978).

For those choosing to run for Parliament the costs were high, particularly if standing in a county seat. Hanham (1978: 258) estimates that after 1867 the average annual costs of being a Member of Parliament were £850 in a county constituency (£4,250 over a typical five year election cycle) and £423 in a borough (£2,115 over five years); all these costs were met by the candidate himself through his own personal wealth and, occasionally, fundraising activities. These amounts can be further broken down into two categories: campaign and routine costs. In the counties a typical campaign would cost £3,000, with a further £200 need to pay the costs of the Returning Officer (the official responsible for the operation and administration of the poll). On election roughly £1,050 a year would be required – £750 on registration activities and £300 in subscriptions to relevant organisations in the constituency to carry favour with them. Required expenditures in borough constituencies were lower although still large. Campaign costs amounted to an average of £1,315, with the vast majority of this sum spent on the campaign itself (£1,210) and the remainder paid to the returning officer (£105); after election around £500 a year would be spent on registering voters and objecting to others during the annual revisions of the electoral roll, with £300 needed for political subscriptions.¹⁵ In addition to all these costs Members were required to provide for their own living costs since no salary was paid or expense allowance provided for travelling to and from and for accommodation in London.¹⁶

¹⁵ Because of the slow growth of local party organisations during the nineteenth century candidates bore the financial burden of the registration process. Strategic management of the electoral register in a constituency could be critical to the success or failure of a candidate's election campaign.

¹⁶ See also Coats and Dalton (1992).

The high campaign costs can be accounted for by a number of different factors. First, there was extensive demand for candidates to bribe voters through their agents. This could take two forms: monetary or through treating. The former became more expensive in the 1860s and 1870s since the increased electorate produced by the franchise reforms meant that there were more people to bribe. Although bribes could amount to £5 to £10 a voter in some of the smallest borough constituencies, they did not usually total to more than £1, while in the large constituencies a figure of no more than a half-crown was common (Gwyn, 1978: 391). In addition, there was demand for candidates to 'treat' voters on polling day, commonly through laying on entertainments or by funding the provision of refreshments in local inns, particularly in county constituencies. As Gwyn (1978: 393) notes, 'the tradesmen most notorious for bleeding candidates were the publicans who often gave their votes only to the candidate who "opened" their houses at election time'. Treating was perpetuated because publicans frequently composed a large section of the electorate – for example, in Southampton ten per cent and in Tynemouth one-eighth of the electorate were publicans (Gwyn, 1978: 393). Similarly, candidates were expected to ingratiate themselves with voters by finding work for them, their friends and their relatives as cabdrivers, messengers, canvassers, clerks, agents and poll watchers. Despite the fact that no money actually changed hands, other than in payment of travelling expenses, this was an indirect form of bribery which still sought to influence votes by providing jobs.

As the more obvious forms of bribery were increasingly legislated against, treating became much more extensive as well as an increasing tendency by individuals and organisations involved in the election to increase their charges

on the candidate. Returning Officers and solicitors acting as agents to candidates often increased their fees, while newspaper owners charged double the normal rate for election advertisements (Gwyn, 1978: 393). In addition to these candidates were committed to heavy routine payments between elections, in particular to meet the costs of the annual registration process and in the form of annual subscriptions to local political clubs and charities where they were politically relevant (see Jaggard, 2000).

Much of the money for these payments, corrupt or not, came from the pockets of the candidates themselves. At least up until the Third Reform Act, very little money was raised through national avenues because of the slow growth in concrete party organisations and a lack of identification with specific party labels. The Liberal Central Association was formed in 1861 and the Conservative Central Office in 1870 but their initial responsibilities extended no further than defending election petitions. It was only when the trials of these were moved to the constituencies in 1868 that the remits of the two organisations began to be focused on the electoral process; in their new form their role extended to the recruitment of candidates, the collection of intelligence about the state of local political feeling and local party organisations, and the provision of literature and speakers for meetings (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981: 22-3).¹⁷

¹⁷ Even though it was equipped with a new remit in the early 1880s the Conservative office employed just three administrative officers and their secretaries (Feuchtwanger, 1968: 150-1, 160-1).

The funds raised by national party organisations were limited both in themselves and in terms of where they were spent. Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 20-1), for example, states that they may only have been used in about three dozen boroughs and three counties in 1859. Hanham (1978: 372) records that between 1868 and 1880 the Conservatives hoped to raise around £50,000 each election cycle, of which roughly 60 per cent was spent on the election itself – on a national scale such sums were small in comparison with the total amounts being spent by candidates themselves. The Liberals typically raised less (between one-fifth and a half) and spent this money disproportionately in county seats, Ireland and Scotland (see Hanham, 1954). In general the funds raised by the two national organisations were kept secret. This was for two key reasons: first the existence of national ‘war chests’ for candidates to draw on, ‘impinged on the idea that politics was an activity for gentlemen of independent means’ (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981: 20), and second, secrecy meant that party leaders could avoid becoming implicated in the ensuing scandal if it was subsequently discovered that money from them was used to bribe voters.

While national sources provided less than five per cent of candidates expenses (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981: 22), far larger sums were raised at a local level. The first Liberal and Conservative constituency associations were formed during the 1830s onwards and by the 1870s they were both more widespread and sophisticated in nature, a tendency that was kick started by the widening of the urban electorate after the Second Reform Act. Apart from at election time these were generally only active for elections or annual process of registrations, however, when they employed local lawyers to do their work. These were typically paid for by the potential candidate or the sitting Member of Parliament,

preserving any funds the constituency association had raised for use during the next election campaign.

The high cost of running for election had a significant impact on the social composition of the House of Commons. The great personal wealth that a run for office demanded meant that only the very rich or those able to secure the support of a wealthy patron could afford to stand. As a result MPs were generally landowners, the relatives or landowners or those who had landowners as patrons; a minority were businessmen or professionals. Consequently, the aristocratic dominance in both Conservative and Liberal ranks continued a long time after wider Victorian society had undergone its social revolution (Vincent, 1966: xx). The high costs of running also increased the number of uncontested constituencies, particularly before the Second Reform Act. Individuals were unwilling to put themselves forward and spend their own money unless they were certain that they would be elected; where constituencies returned two members deals were frequently drawn up to return one Conservative and one Liberal in order to avoid the financial costs of a contested election.

Faced with these high costs, there were ongoing attempts to introduce legal restrictions to limit both these and the extent of bribery. During this initial aristocratic period, however, the impact of legislation was limited by the material benefits of having a seat in Parliament. The ability to influence government and the decisions it took – perhaps even as a member of the cabinet – meant that many candidates remained as willing as ever to spend whatever was necessary to win and subsequently hold a seat. The earliest attempts at legal enforcement occurred during the Parliaments of Edward I when statutes about free and unbribed elections were enacted (Garrard, 2002: 260-1). However, it was not

until the 1696 Treating Act and the 1729 Bribery Act that bribery was made a common-law offence with severe penalties for transgressors. These included fines for those offering bribes and the disenfranchisement of voters and boroughs where they were offered, solicited or accepted.

These enforcement penalties persisted until 1854 although there were other attempts to reduce the amount of bribery during the intervening period. The 1832 Reform Act had sought but failed to eliminate grosser forms of corruption through the extension of the franchise to include the £10 householder vote, a new category that was considered, '... rather innocently ... [to be] ... a suitable carrier for moralisation' (Garrard, 2002: 261). Similarly, the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Expenses in 1834, 'made large but fruitless proposals to reduce election expenses by legal provision ...' (Machin, 2001: 28). Later again, the 1841 Bribery Act (reinforced by a further Act in 1843) sought to strengthen the powers of Parliamentary election committees against corruption, but again with little effect (Gwyn, 1962: 80-2). The most extensive, and to that date successful, piece of legislation designed to deal with corrupt election expenditures was enacted in 1854. The Corrupt Practices (or 'Bribery') Act of that year was the first legislation to clearly define bribery, treating and undue influence (which was to include the abduction of voters during an election) and to include realistic penalties for illegal actions. The old £500 fine for bribery was abolished on the grounds that it was too large and replaced with a smaller £50 charge payable by individuals found guilty of treating. This was accompanied by new penalties for the briber and the recipient, both of whom were barred from participating in any election during the period of the new Parliament; additionally, if the latter had already voted, their vote was discounted.

Candidates were also required to return an account of their personal expenses and payments made either by himself or his agent before and after nomination day to an election auditor within one month of the election. This provision, however, often failed because candidates simply sent incomplete accounts that also excluded any corrupt expenditure; the auditors were not provided with any legal powers of investigation and consequently had to take them on trust. Although it was the most comprehensive legislation to date, the impact of the 1854 Act was limited. Electors could see little reason to fear prosecution for accepting bribes (Gwyn, 1962: 84, 91) while, as Seymour (1915: 232) states, the Act 'made no attempt to prevent bribery by rendering it useless, nor did it impose any real check upon undue influence'.

The final attempt at legislating to reduce the high costs of elections during the aristocratic era came in 1868 with the Corrupt Practices at Elections Act. This was primarily an attempt to reform the expensive and over-lenient method (because of the number of interested parties in the House of Commons) of trying election petitions by moving them away from London to the constituency they involved. Alongside this the penalty for bribery was increased so that any individual found guilty was barred from being an MP and holding any national or local public office for the next seven years; the same penalty could also be applied if they employed anyone who had been convicted of bribery offences within the last seven years. In general, however, the Act failed to reduce the cost of election petitions – its primary aim. Although it saved on the costs of transporting witnesses to London and putting them up for the duration of the trial, these savings were more than cancelled out by the increased fees demanded by counsel in return for travelling to the constituencies. As Gwyn

(1962: 85) argues, winning candidates in particular were happy to pay these because having already spent large amounts during the election in order to try to win the seat they did not want to lose it.

The final general election of the aristocratic period in 1880 was the most expensive on record. A still growing electorate combined with a decline in the number of uncontested seats to drive costs upwards, although they may well have been much higher still since not all candidates returned their expenses as required and few checks were carried out to verify the accuracy of those that were submitted. The overall level of expenditure by candidates at this election underlined the extent to which attempts to legislate against high costs and bribery during the aristocratic era had failed. Legislative measures that were passed were not seriously concerned with eliminating corrupt practices but rather with retrospective punishment if they were discovered and although many politicians would have liked to end them, they feared the alternatives: that they might be unseated or forced to spend a lot of own money because of the illegal activities of their supporters or their political opponents.

The final decade of the aristocratic era saw the first attempts to introduce measures specifically aimed at the eradication of corrupt practices at source. In 1872 the introduction of the secret ballot aimed to put a stop to treating and bribery by making the briber uncertain of whether his money was achieving a return. It worked in two ways: first, by making the act of voting itself secret so they would be unsure of whether the bribe had successfully swayed the voter, and secondly by making the state of poll secret so that it would be harder to judge whether it was close enough to warrant bribing voters. The Act also assimilated the corrupt practice laws for municipal elections, hitherto separate,

into those for Parliamentary elections so that the same penalties applied regardless of the type of election. This measure was borne out of the realisation that it was impossible to reduce the extent of corruption at general elections when the contests for local offices continued to be conducted corruptly (Gwyn, 1978: 401). However, as with previous legislation the impact of the 1872 Act was more limited than was intended – as Garrard (2002: 261) notes:

... whilst secret voting and abandoning the hustings reduced the motivation and extent of violence and intimidation, the smallness of many polling districts left voters vulnerable to determined employers, enquiring or guessing about their workers' electoral obedience. Venal electors could also now take bribes from everyone, then consult the remains of their consciences inside the polling booth.

The most extensive, and ultimately effective, legislation followed in 1883 when the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act was passed into law – the legislation generated the documents used for the second database. It followed the 1880 general election, a contest that is widely considered to have been the most expensive general election of the nineteenth century and one which led to the instigation of a Royal Commission to investigate the extent of the corrupt practices that occurred during it (Gwyn, 1978: 401).¹⁸ Passed with support from both the Conservative and Liberal benches, the provisions it contained were a landmark in British electoral history and have provided the basis for all subsequent attempts at controlling political spending. The Act introduced strict limits on both the amounts candidates were able to spend (determined by whether a constituency was a county or a borough) and what funds could be

¹⁸ Machin (2001: 90-3) outlines the political machinations surrounding the Act.

used for. Certain types of expenditure were banned altogether, for example the provision of refreshments or payments to cover the transport of voters to the polls, and it was forbidden for anyone to incur any election expense without written permission from the candidate or from his legally appointed election agent.¹⁹ The latter was a new provision intended to eliminate expenditure on a candidate's behalf but allegedly without his knowledge and was accompanied with tight disclosure rules which set exact procedures for presentation and public inspection of campaign accounts.

Candidates, whether successful or not, were expected to provide itemised returns accounting for all expenditure that had taken place between the announcement of the election writ and the closing of the poll. These were to be broken down into seven categories: Agents; Clerks and Messengers; Printing, Advertising, Stationary, Postage, and Telegrams; Public Meetings; Committee Rooms; Miscellaneous Matters; and Personal Expenses. A similar requirement was made of Returning Officers – the public officials responsible for the administration and running of the poll itself – whose charges were borne by the candidates; there was growing concern in Parliament that these individuals could levy whatever charges they deemed appropriate without any need to

¹⁹ The paid employment of election officials was also limited by the Act, making it more important than before for candidates to find volunteers. This allowed many middle-class women to participate in getting the vote out, even if they themselves could not vote. It also gave rise to organisations that were either affiliated or sympathetic to a particular political party, such as the Primrose League in the case of the Conservatives (see Robb, 1942).

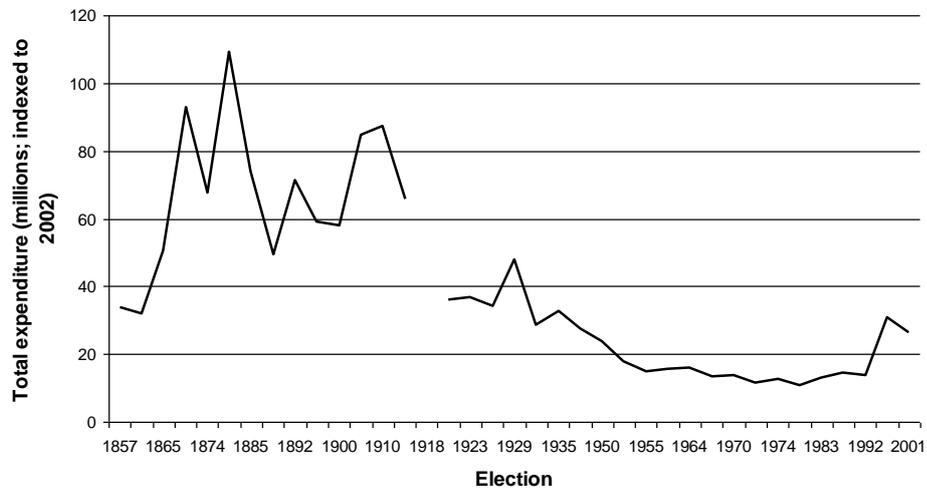
account for them.²⁰ The returns from every constituency were subsequently collated and printed a short time after the election as a Parliamentary Paper.

Alongside these provisions, the penalties for corrupt practices were increased. Persons found guilty of corrupt practices by an election court could be fined £200 and imprisoned for a year, while candidates who were personally found guilty of corruption would be permanently barred from standing for election in the constituency where the offence occurred, and lose their right to vote, hold any public or judicial office or sit in the House of Commons for seven years (Machin, 2001: 92). The measures in the Act were, 'by far the most stringent ever passed in Britain against electoral malpractices' (O'Leary, 1962: 175).

The impact of the 1883 Act on the amounts spent on election campaigns in Britain during the nineteenth century is clearly depicted in Figure 0.1. Over the last 150 years the amounts spent on election campaigns in Britain have

²⁰ The Returning Officer's Charges were required to be reported in eight categories: For Publishing Notice of Election, and preparing and supplying Nomination Papers; For Travelling Expenses, Conveyance of Ballot Boxes, and for Travelling Expenses of Presiding Officers and Clerks, etc.; Cost of Polling Stations; Cost of Dies, Ballot Papers, Boxes, Advertising, Placards, Stationary, Copies of Register, etc.; Cost of Presiding Officers, Clerks at Polling Stations, Counting Clerks etc.; For Making Return to Clerk of the Crown, and preparing and publishing Notices other than Notice of Election; Fee Charged by Returning Officer or his Official for Professional and other Assistance, and for Services and Expenses in relation to Accounts of Election Expenses; and All other expenses of the Returning Officer.

Figure 0.1 Total campaign expenditure at British general elections, 1857-2001



Source: Derived from Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 27) and Electoral Commission (2005).

decreased substantially, a decline that has occurred in three main stages.²¹ The first stage runs from around the time of the passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867 through to the start of World War One and was characterised by expenditure levels which, on average, exceeded £70 million per election campaign. The implementation of the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act had an immediate impact on campaign spending, reducing the amounts spent from over £100 million during the 1880 general election, to a little over half of this during the next election, in 1885. Its impact was, however, short-lived, because thereafter costs began to steadily increase once again, rising to almost £90 million for the January 1910 general election. The second phase runs from

²¹ All expenditure amounts have been indexed to 2002 to allow for easier comparison. The procedure used to do this is outlined by Officer (2008).

the end of World War One through to around the general election of 1992, and is characterised by a gradual decline in campaign costs to under £20 million, one-quarter or less of the amounts spent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The general elections of both 1997 and 2001 have, however, seen increased levels of expenditure as election campaigns have become more sophisticated and dependent on the use of resources other than the voluntary labour of party activists.

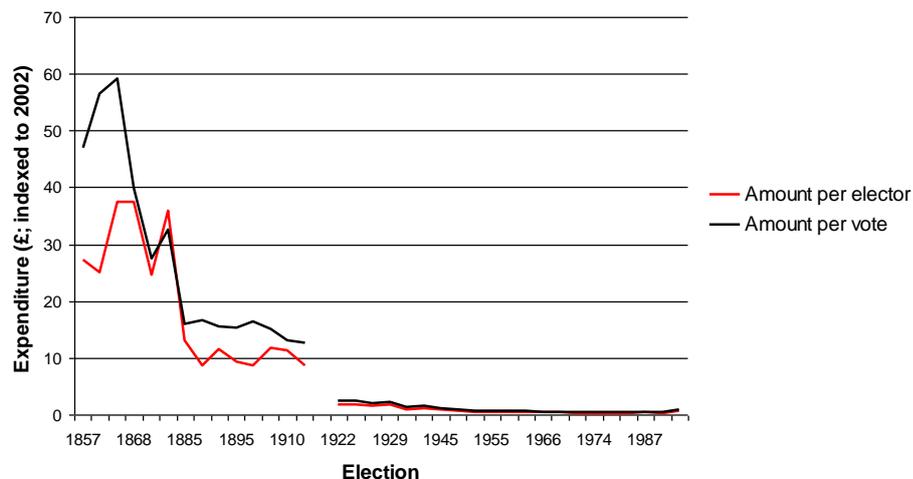
During the period between 1880 and 1900 over 90 per cent of all campaign expenditure in Britain occurred in England, with two-thirds of this being spent in county constituencies. Although it was no more expensive for a candidate to run in an English constituency compared to one in Scotland or Wales, those standing in county constituencies could expect to spend as least twice as much as those in borough seats (£72,751 as compared to £38,358 in 1885, for example). The exact cost of fighting a constituency, however, varied according to three main factors: the length of the campaign, its character (the degree of competition a candidate faced, for example) and, in the absence of central party funding, the length of the candidates' purse and the amount of voluntary assistance he could call upon.²²

The decline in overall campaign expenditure during the late nineteenth century was mirrored by a gradual decline in the amounts spent per elector and per vote (Figure 0.2). Although candidates had spent almost £40 per elector and £60 per vote on average in 1868, by 1885 the two were much more closely aligned as turnout amongst the registered electorate rose, with the result that

²² Further details on variations in constituency campaign expenditure are provided by Gwyn (1962: 94) and Hanham (1978: 249-61).

they were generally less than £20 each. Such a trend runs counter to what might be expected: namely that as the electorate expanded in size during the nineteenth century, campaign costs might be expected to rise as a consequence of the cost of communicating with greater numbers of voters.

Figure 0.2 Expenditure per elector and per vote, 1857-2001



Source: Derived from Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 27); Electoral Commission (2005); Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 8-66).

Although this thesis adopts a long term view of the evolution and operation of the British electoral system beginning in 1832, an important part of the analysis focuses on the period between the general election of 1885, the first after the Third Reform Act, and that of December 1910, the last before the start of World War One. Before 1885 a very large number of constituencies returned multiple members to Parliament – in some cases up to three or four – making statistical analysis of returns from them particularly difficult. This is especially the case with respect to trends in turnout because electors were able to cast multiple votes at each election, making it impossible to calculate the exact number

who did vote. The Third Reform Act, while not removing the loopholes in the franchise which allowed for plural voters, converted almost all Parliamentary seats into single-member constituencies, an action which makes this statistical analysis of this period significantly easier to accomplish.²³

A focus on this period also has two other methodological advantages. Firstly, it has conventionally been seen as the era during which party lines hardened and electoral competition became much more focused on candidates representing a specific party slate (see Cox, 1987). Throughout this thesis terms such as 'Conservative', 'Liberal' and 'Labour' are used in a broad sense to group these candidates together in a manner which is convenient for analytical purposes, something that would not be possible for the pre-Third Reform Act period when party labels were much more amorphous. Associated with the rise of the party was a growth in the expectation that parties would contest every Parliamentary seat, even if it was unwinnable. The impact of this was to greatly reduce the number of uncontested seats, a common feature of the electoral landscape before the Second Reform Act. Other than in 1886, when a general election was called only 11 months after the last one, the quantity of uncontested constituencies was very low between 1885 and

²³ A small number of constituencies, such as the City of London, continued to return multiple members to Parliament after the Third Reform Act. In the case of these the average vote for each party has been calculated and substituted for the actual values in order to simulate a single-member constituency.

December 1910.²⁴ This also allows for a more complete quantitative analysis of the electoral system during this period since there are few 'gaps' in the results.²⁵

Thesis Outline

Using these sources this thesis examines the electoral geographies of Britain during the long nineteenth century, complimenting a strong tradition of critical historical geography (see, for example, Baker and Gregory (1984) and Livingstone (1992)). It will focus on the operation of the electoral system and the outcomes it produced between 1832 and December 1910, moving through a variety of scales – Britain as a whole; England, Scotland and Wales; regions; and individual constituencies – to consider the role that a number of different geographies – among them vote distributions, malapportionment, turnout and campaign expenditure – played in the process of translating votes into seats. The first three chapters provide an overview of the electoral geography of nineteenth-century Britain. Chapter one does this at a national level by concentrating on the long-term trends in party vote shares. It first argues that

²⁴ The number and geography of uncontested Parliamentary seats is examined in more detail in chapter two.

²⁵ Arguably these could be filled by simulating election results in uncontested constituencies by applying the uniform national swing to the last results from the last time it was contested. However, many of the uncontested constituencies after 1885 remained uncontested at most general elections, meaning that there is nothing to apply the swing to.

both long and short-term events shaped the patterns of popular support for the two main political groupings before moving on to apply two specific indicators of long-term electoral change, swing and electoral volatility, to aggregate national election results. The results obtained from these indicate that although the Conservatives and Liberals entered the post Third Reform Act period relatively evenly matched, the Conservatives maintained a slight advantage at the subsequent general elections.

The second and third chapters examine how the national geography of electoral support translated into a geography of support at a regional and local level. After 1885 there was an increasing regionalisation of electoral support, with the opening up of a north-south divide and a growing divide between different constituency types in terms of the dominant party. Chapter two also argues the electoral landscape was not just comprised of the results of contested constituencies; uncontested seats were just as important since they indicated areas of party strength. Building on this analysis of the geographies of electoral support, the third chapter moves on to consider the operation of the electoral system and how it translated the votes that were cast into Parliamentary seats. It finds that it did this badly: increasingly disproportional results that were also biased in favour of the Liberal party were produced by the first past the post system after 1886.

Geography is at the heart of chapters four through to seven. These seek to explain why the Liberals benefitted from the system using the concept of bias developed by Johnston et al. (2001b) from the work of Brookes (1959; 1960). Having quantified the amount and direction of the bias in the previous chapter, these chapters outline the general theory behind this and the specific causes in

the nineteenth century. The key factor here is how several different geographies – of electorate sizes, vote distributions, turnout and campaign expenditure – combined with the set of geographical containers (the individual constituencies) to translate votes into seats. Chapter four outlines the main concepts of bias and how they can affect election results, before quantifying the contribution of the individual bias components to the net total. These are examined in more detail in chapters five through to seven, which show how a variety of legal, social, economic, political and electoral factors – rural to urban migration and turnout, for instance – played an important role in influencing how equally the two Conservatives and Liberals were treated by the nineteenth-century electoral system.

Ultimately, the thesis examines the evolution of the British electoral system using these different themes, arguments and methodologies to investigate how efficient the translation of votes into seats was in the nineteenth century, how this process changed and how a modern electoral system was, or was not, created.

Chapter 1

The National Electoral Geographies of the Nineteenth Century

Introduction: Elections as Meeting Points

Studies of nineteenth-century politics have divided between examinations of high and low politics. The growth of cabinet government, issues of war and peace, the act of governing and the implementation of policy, the development of the civil service and of Parliament itself, have dominated 'high' political analysis of the period, alongside studies of notable personalities and the impact of significant events – the Corn Laws, Irish Home Rule or electoral reform, for example.¹ In contrast, studies of low politics have focused on riot,

¹ On the growth of cabinet government the classic work is Macdonagh (1958), although its key assertions have been challenged by Parris (1960); see also Cox (1987). The evolution of the act of governing and the implementation of policy during the nineteenth century are covered by, amongst others, Foord (1947), Fraser (1960) and Vernon (1993). On the development of the civil service see Chapman (2004) and Griffith (1954). 'High' political analysis conceives of politics through its key figures and their personalities and actions, in particular Prime Ministers and key reformers. There is an extensive literature in this area – some examples are, on Gladstone: Adelman (1983), Blake (1969), Jagger (1998) and Matthew (1997); on Salisbury and Peel, Marsh (1978) and

demonstration and protest, pressure groups and their petitions and meetings, and the development of organisations, such as trade unions, which represented the working masses.² In contrast to both, however, elections have attracted relatively little interest. Yet they are key to the study of politics since they are the meeting point between high and low politics, the means by which the relationship between Parliament and the people is mediated.

Studies of the electoral politics of nineteenth-century Britain have tended to adopt one of two approaches: either providing an in-depth examination of individual elections – 1841 (Kemp, 1952; Jaggard, 1984) or 1880 (Lloyd, 1968), for example – or concentrating on describing individual contests in particular counties (see, for example, Clarke, 1971; Davis, 1972; Howarth, 1969; McCord and Carrick, 1966; Olney, 1973) or constituencies (Fisher, 1981; Moore, 2001).

Newbould (1983) respectively; and on Joseph Chamberlain, Jay (1981). For further details of the controversy surrounding the repeal of the Corn Laws and its impact on party politics, see Kitson-Clark (1962) and Stewart (1994). On the Irish Home Rule crisis see Loughlin (1986), Lubenow (1988; 1994) and O'Day (1998). The issue of electoral reform has received significant attention – excellent overviews are provided by Garrard (2002) and Machin (2001).

² Again, these areas have received considerable attention. On the history of riots and popular disturbances Rude (1999) and Stevenson (1992) are a good starting point. Biagini and Reid (1991), Hamer (1977), Ward (1970), provide an introduction to nineteenth-century pressure groups. The historiography of the Labour movement and trade unionism is extensive: Pelling (1965) is the classic work on the formation of the Labour party, together with Stedman Jones (1974); see also Phillips (1992).

In both cases the studies have chosen to focus on these because of the peculiarities of the contest, either in terms of their being an exception to the established pattern of national politics or because of the significance of a local issue, rather than because of its ability to illuminate particular processes of national political or electoral change.³

There are four partial exceptions to this rule. Pelling's *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (1967) was the first attempt to examine British general election results on a constituency by constituency basis over an extended period of time, and to relate them to patterns of religious adherence, social status, occupation, and local and regional political loyalties. Similarly, Kinnear, in his *British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885* (1981), aimed to outline the evolving patterns of electoral support and, through this, to relate the development of the three major political parties to their local organisations and the long-term voting habits of each constituency. Finally, Clarke (1972) and, to a lesser extent Dunbabin (1966), examine the links between voting behaviour, its possible influences and election outcomes.⁴ However, it is important to note that, with the exception of Clarke who commences his study in 1832 and Dunbabin who begins in 1868, both Pelling and Kinnear – the most comprehensive studies – only examine the geography of electoral support from the 1885 general election onwards.

The overall aim of this chapter and the one that follows is to analyse the electoral geography of Britain over a much greater period of time, beginning in

³ On this point, more generally, see Lawrence and Taylor (1997).

⁴ A recent reconsideration of Clarke and the longer term context to post-1979 voting is provided by Stevens (1999).

1832 with the first general election after the passage of the Reform Act in that year.⁵ To do this, this chapter analyses the long-term trends in the electoral support for parties at the national level. Firstly, it considers the trends in party vote shares in Britain, examining how both long and short-term events shaped the patterns of popular support for the two major political groupings, the Whigs (later the Liberals) and the Conservatives, before examining the rise of third party support and the linkages between earlier radical movements and the later rise of Labour representation. Secondly, it evaluates the extent of electoral change between 1832 and 1910 by applying two indicators of long-term electoral change, swing and electoral volatility, to the aggregate national election results. Chapter two builds on issues raised here in greater detail by analysing the regional geographies of election outcomes within England, Scotland and Wales, in particular the differences between borough, county and university constituencies. It also examines the impact of the local geography of support, and the consequences of this for competition between political parties.

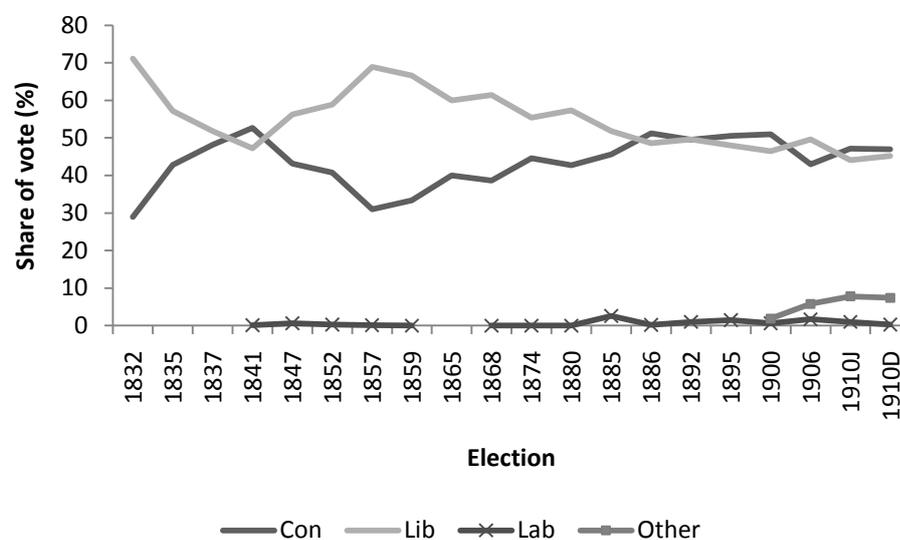
Liberal and Conservative Electoral Support

Prior to their replacement by Labour as the only serious alternative party to the Conservatives in the early twentieth century, the Liberals, and their forebears the Whigs, dominated nineteenth-century political life. Of the 15 Prime Ministers

⁵ Other studies, such as Moore (1976) and Hanham (1978), have examined longer time spans but focus on issues of paternalism and deference and the growth and operation of party organisations respectively, rather than electoral geography.

between 1832 and 1910, eight were Liberal, whilst a Whig or Liberal government was in power for almost 47 of the 78 years. This dominance was underscored through success at the polls, as Figure 1.1 demonstrates, with the Liberals achieving a majority share of the popular vote at 14 of the 20 general elections during the period.

Figure 1.1 Party shares of votes in general elections, 1832-December 1910⁶



Source: Derived from Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 68-70)

Although studies of nineteenth-century politics have conventionally adopted the three Reform Acts as convenient dividers, the results shown in Figure 1.1 clearly show an alternative pattern of electoral support. Indeed, as Clarke (1972: 32) contends, 'the more we look at the workings of the [electoral] system, the more clearly we see that a neat periodization with divisions at 1832, 1867

⁶ The party names are consistently abbreviated in all figures and tables in this thesis as follows: Con – Conservative, Lib – Liberal, Lab – Labour, and Other – All other candidates not affiliated to any of the three main parties.

and 1884 is inappropriate'; this argument applies particularly to the period between the second and third Reform Acts when the introduction of a variety of other ballot and franchise initiatives mean none of the four elections in the intervening period were held under the same conditions.⁷ Instead, three distinct phases in the pattern of electoral politics can be discerned, the first beginning with the General election of 1832 and running through to that of 1857, a second spanning the period between 1859 and 1885, and the last starting in 1886 and ending with the election of December 1910.

1832-1857

The Liberals began the post-Reform era with the largest share of the popular vote they would ever achieve (71.1 per cent), and the Conservatives with their lowest (28.9 per cent). Over the next two elections this position of strength occupied by the Liberals was substantially eroded, to the extent that by the General election of 1841 the Conservatives were returned to government with a

⁷ The general election of 1868 was the first under the new franchise implemented by the Second Reform Act; the 1874 contest was the first to be conducted using a secret ballot; the 1878 Registration Act further increased the differences in the franchise between the counties and the boroughs. The passage of the Third Reform Act in 1884 ensured that another system of registration and franchises, accompanied by new constituency boundaries radically transformed the electoral system yet again. See Clarke (1972: 31-4) for further discussion of this point. Seymour (1915: 376-80) provides further details of the specific changes that took place.

share of the vote that exceeded that of the Liberals by five percentage points. This victory was, however, a solitary success for the Tories during this first period, as in subsequent elections the Liberals regained the ascendancy and the former fell away again. So stark was this turnaround that by the 1857 election, the final contest of this phase, support for the two parties was almost identical to what it had been in 1832. Within these trends three particular issues therefore stand out: firstly, the Liberal dominance (despite a temporary decline during the later 1830s); second, the poor performance of Conservative candidates; and, finally, the temporary surge in support for the Tories during the late 1830s and early 1840s.

The election of December 1832 produced a substantial Liberal majority, with Whigs and Radicals together winning 483 seats compared to just 175 by Tories, an advantage of 308. Gash (1953: 239) attributes this result to an, 'electorate still under the influence of reforming idealism', and such an outcome certainly seems to suggest that not only had the new franchise arrangements put in place by the Liberals worked in their favour at this election but they would continue to do so for the foreseeable future. To attribute the Liberal success solely to the franchise would, however, be to ignore two specific events during the half decade immediately before the First Reform Act, namely the disintegration of the Tories and the increasing entanglement of the embryonic reform movement and the Liberals.

According to Cannon (1973: 187) there was little substantial interest in reform through Britain as late as 1827. However, over the following five years several factors combined to bring it about. Firstly, revived radical agitation and organisation, together with the formation of liberal political unions and other

reforming societies, across the country increased awareness of demands for reform. These found a welcome home in both radical and non-radical newspapers (Eastwood, 1997: 74-5), the latter increasingly able to free themselves from the financial control of politicians as their readerships increased (Gash, 1959: xiii). In addition, the agricultural 'Swing Riots' of 1829-30 in the southern counties of England became increasingly linked with popular franchise reforms. The General Election of July and August 1830 marked a significant turning point in the pre-reform era, and the results reflected the extent of the revival of the reform movement. Candidates that favoured reform did well, with several victories for radicals, while there were some unexpected defeats for the Tories (Machin, 2001: 10).

The pressure for reform was not, however, the solitary reason behind the Conservative loss, which can also be attributed to the divisions within the Tories. These were caused by a combination of events between 1827 and 1830 and followed the resignation of Lord Liverpool as Prime Minister in 1827. During his fifteen years in this position he had appeared as the only leading man within Toryism capable of holding together the various factions. However, the move towards Catholic emancipation in Ireland coupled with an inability to decide how to deal with sustained outbreaks of violence across England illuminated the divisions within the Tories during 1828-29, and ultimately split the grouping in 1830.⁸ This ensured that they entered the post-Reform era at a distinct disadvantage, lacking the momentum the Liberals had gained during this five

⁸ Many Whigs supported the demand for reform as the best way to quell the violence, thus fuelling the reform movement further.

year period, both in terms of their organisation and links to the electorate through their championing of a popular cause.

However, although the Liberals began this first period substantially better prepared for the new electoral system than the Tories, their advantage had already begun to erode by 1835. This contest saw the Whigs reduced to an overall majority of 108, just one-third of the advantage they had previously enjoyed, mainly through heavy losses in county seats. This was evidence of the revival of Conservative fortunes, a process that had begun in 1834-5 during the hundred day period when they had formed the government. The heightened morale and discipline of this period led directly to the creation of Conservative and Constitutional Associations in the constituencies, with the result that, '... from 1835 the Conservative party grew steadily as a national movement, organised as no political party had ever been organised before for the purpose of winning Parliamentary elections' (Gash, 1953: 143). In addition, the Tories benefited from the insertion of the Chandos clause, a Conservative amendment, during the committee stage of First Reform Act. This enfranchised £50 'tenants at will' in county constituencies, a large group of tenants, and was an obvious boost to the political influence of landowners.⁹ Although the pre-reform Whig government was against the clause its implications were ambivalent and some radicals voted for it because at least it enfranchised more people (Brock, 1973: 228; Seymour, 1915: 18-20). Such support, however, ignored the potential boost it could, and did, subsequently provide to the Tories.

⁹ These were tenants only at the will of the landlord, without guaranteed occupancy for any period, whose holdings had an annual value of £50 or above (Machin, 2001: 17).

Simultaneously, the heterogeneous composition of the Liberal party was becoming increasingly obvious. While the Whigs were aristocratic and conservative, the social composition of the larger Liberal grouping was at odds with both their electoral base and their natural political allies (Gash, 1953: 164-5).¹⁰ At the election of 1837, caused by the death of William IV, the Liberal majority slumped further to just 40. The contest marked another crucial point in the Conservative recovery, since the continued electoral gains made the Tories, 'a more powerful opposition than any known before' (Gash, 1953: 145). This success was followed by further erosion of Liberal support through a series of by-election victories, mostly in the English counties as the Whigs retreated.

The resurgence in Conservative support during the second half of the 1830s culminated in their election victory in 1841, the solitary Tory victory between the first two Reform Acts. This trend was undoubtedly aided, as Gash (1959: 239-40) argues, by the 'unprecedented and largely fortuitous occurrence of four General elections in the space of nine years'. The election had been called following a vote of no confidence in the Whig ministry after it had announced a fixed duty scheme for corn. There is, however, a lack of consensus over the exact role that this issue played in securing electoral success for the Tories. Kemp (1952) and Gash (1953) both argue that the Corn Laws played a role only late in the election and that it was a coalition of clergy and landed interests that carried them to victory rather than anti-protectionist sentiment. Although neither doubts the strength of this, Gash (1959: xix) contends that this was an extra-

¹⁰ Gash (1953: 168n) states that contemporary analyses of the composition of the 'Liberal party' suggested that there were 80 Radicals, 100 Liberals and 152 Whigs – a majority of 28 for the Liberal grouping over their Whig counterparts.

Parliamentary movement, and that what voters were actually faced with was a choice between two systems of Protection (Gash, 1953: 146). In contrast, Jaggard (1984) disputes the role of anti-Corn Law sentiment in the election, arguing that it was essentially a single-issue contest. Through an analysis of the published election addresses and speeches from the hustings by candidates, he claims that the government tariff proposals were among the most conspicuous of the issues that were discussed.

Kemp, Gash and Jaggard, however, all agree on the role of registrations in the election. Jaggard (1984: 112) argues that almost all historians of the period have overlooked the importance of these but that they were indicative of the Tory revival. The Conservatives had greater success than their Liberal counterparts at registering voters between 1837 and 1841, prompting many of their rivals for office to leave seats uncontested. Registrations were, he proposes, particularly high in rural areas – in part due to the influential role of the clergy – where protectionism was more of an issue. Gash (1959: xii) goes further and suggests that the key role played by the new registration societies, constituency organisations and central party agents in this election are indicative of the breakthrough of the modern party system.

Most clearly of all the 1841 election marked the re-emergence of the Tory party following its split in 1830. Such unity was not, however, permanent and at the contests of 1847, 1852 and 1857 the Liberals gradually re-established the position they had had occupied in 1832. A new split in the Tory party over the repeal of the Corn Laws preceded success at the 1847 election, although this did not immediately translate into a substantial Parliamentary majority for the Liberals. Instead, they were left largely dependent on continued division

between Protectionist and Peelite (pro abolition) Conservatives to keep power because of the strength of independent and extreme radicals within the party (Machin, 2001: 37; Gash, 1953: 192). Thus, 'the general election of 1847 was a prelude not to a fresh start but to an unhappy recapitulation of the late 1830s with much the same men and much the same problems' (Gash, 1953: 192). Peelite Conservatives continued to hold the balance of power in 1852 despite the continued growth in popular support for the Liberals, but by 1857, following significant losses in their Lancashire stronghold, they ceased to have a role to play as the Liberals gained a majority of 100.

1859-1885

Whereas the Liberals dominated the first cycle of post-Reform electoral politics, the second period was marked by a steady decline in their lead over the Tories. Conventionally the first disintegration of the Liberals is dated at 1886, with the schism over Irish Home Rule, but it is arguable that this was the end product of a long process of decline that had begun around thirty years earlier. At the beginning of the period, in 1859, the Liberals attained exactly two-thirds of the popular vote, the third largest in their history after those achieved in 1832 and at the previous General election in 1857, but by 1885 the Conservatives had reduced their lead to just six percentage points. This period can itself be divided into two distinct eras: the late 1850s and early 1860s and the period after the passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867.

The electoral politics of the period between the death of Peel in mid 1850 and the Reform Act of 1867 have received almost no attention, perhaps because of

the relative inactivity of the political arena during this period when compared to both earlier and later periods. Drake (1971: 477) argues the period was characterised by a series of weak, and often coalition, ministries, with politics dominated by personality rather than parties and principles and lacking a substantive issue – such as free trade or, until the mid 1860s, Parliamentary reform – that would ignite political opinion.

The competition between the Liberals and the Tories, however, increased from 1867 onwards, with the gap between the two main parties becoming steadily smaller. After what Dunbabin (1966: 83) terms the 'relative laxity and confusion of the Palmerstonian era', the later 1860s saw the hardening of political divisions into a two party mould; this was accompanied by the passage of the Second Reform Act and the consequent increase in the size of the electorate by 82.5 per cent (Garrard, 2002: xii). Initially the passage of reform measures had little effect on the popular support of parties, other than temporarily stalling the decline in support for the Liberals. The new franchise was, however, notable for the extent to which employers sought to exercise influence over their workers: 'the 1868 election was ... the only one which might be called an employers' election' (Vincent, 1967, 104-5). This was the case for two main reasons: firstly, comparatively few workers received the vote under the reforms of 1832, so the political influence of industrial employers had hitherto been minimal, and secondly, the extent of corrupt influence spurred the introduction of the secret ballot by 1872. A total of 101 petitions alleging corrupt

practices were lodged following the election (Craig, 1977: 631), a sum that was surpassed at only one other election in the period between 1832 and 1885.¹¹

Although the new, enlarged electorate voted in a Liberal government with a majority of over 100 in 1868, the following election saw a defeat for the Liberals. Despite losing seven by-elections during 1873, Gladstone chose to dissolve Parliament in January 1874 and at the resulting election the Conservatives obtained a majority of 48 despite trailing the Liberal share of the vote by almost 11 percentage points. The impact of the introduction of the secret ballot was immediately apparent with the return of 57 Irish Nationalist MPs, since the act allowed Irish tenants to vote as they wished without fear of reprisal from their Anglican landlords. The Liberal defeat was arguably both an expression of dissatisfaction with many of the reforms enacted during their period in government and of the resurgent appeal of the Tories. The entire social spectrum had, in one way or another, been affected by the Gladstone administration – industrialists through the legal recognition of trade unions and Nonconformists by the Forster Education Act of 1870, for example – with the

¹¹ This was in 1852 when 122 petitions were lodged although half of these (60) were subsequently withdrawn; in 1868 approximately one-third (34) were withdrawn. It should be noted that 43 of the elections that were petitioned against were upheld and the Member duly elected. At the preceding election, in 1865, only 69 petitions had been lodged. For full details of the number of election petitions see Craig (1977: 631) for the period 1832-1880 and Craig (1974: 651-2) for elections between 1885 and December 1910.

result that many traditional Liberal voters choose to abstain.¹² However, as Dunbabin (1966: 88) argues, 'it is [...] impossible to explain the 1874 results solely in terms of Liberal dissensions and apathy; either the Conservatives were more successful in attracting new voters or (more probably) they secured the conversion of a number of Liberals (or, perhaps, both).' Under Disraeli the Conservatives had sought to portray the Liberals as exhausted, whilst simultaneously making an appeal to patriotism by remodelling the Tories as the party which stood for the strengthening of the Empire and which aimed to improve the condition of the people (Cunningham, 1981; see also Readman, 2001a).

At the final two elections of this second phase the votes of the middle-class became increasingly crucial to electoral success. The 1874 general election marked the beginning of the decline of middle-class support for the Liberal party, and by 1880 they had lost control of suburbia to the Tories altogether (Hanham, 1978: 225-7; Cornford, 1963: 59-60). This transition was a reaction to the changing social character of many constituencies that bordered on or incorporated parts of towns or cities. In the years before the Second Reform Act

¹² Nonconformists were dissatisfied by the compromise which allowed for the continued existence of church schools alongside the establishment of schools run by directly elected school boards. In the lead up to the passage of the Act Dissenting groups had campaigned for publicly funded secular education. It is important to note that although many Nonconformists choose to abstain in 1874, campaigning for elections to the new school boards helped to bring about the more formal organisation of the Liberal party in many areas. See Jackson (1997).

there had been extensive construction of homes for the middle-class and almost all of these were enfranchised in 1867, creating a substantial suburban electorate (Dennis, 1990: 433-4; Hanham, 1978: 225). Although the main support for the Conservatives was and remained the landed interest, after 1874 the party was able to attract the backing of a growing proportion of the middle classes. Lawrence (1993; 1998) attributes this transition to the implementation of a strategy in the mid 1870s that aimed to articulate specifically local concerns as well as reorganise the machinery of the party around a pyramid based on local associations. This move was recognition of the fact that the traditional tools of personal influence and corruption were better suited to rural areas and small boroughs than to attracting mass urban support (Dunbabin, 1966: 90; see also, Cornford, 1963), and allowed local identities to feed into and help shape national allegiances. By 1885 the growth in Conservative support amongst the middle-classes had been joined by a growing working-class Toryism, concentrated in a few areas such as Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow, although it would require the later debate over Irish Home Rule to prompt its true breakthrough into the electoral arena (Coleman, 1988: 185-6, 201-2; Feuchtwanger, 1968: 105-220).

Despite this long-term trend towards the growth of urban Toryism, Hanham (1978: 228-30) argues that the Liberals regained power at the 1880 election through the inability of the Conservative government to address the impact of the agricultural depression, particularly its failure to introduce tariffs to protect against foreign imports. In addition, the Liberals attacked the imperialist rhetoric of the Tories, both on moral grounds and because of its expense. The 1885

election saw the Liberals lose 18 seats but still have a majority of 86 over the Conservatives, despite their vote share falling by a further five points.

In summary, this period is characterised by several long-term processes that do not necessarily owe their existence to the traditional marker posts of the period, such as the Reform Acts or the introduction of the secret ballot. The steady decline of the Liberals, and the inexorable rise of the Conservatives, was driven first by the development of 'modern' party organisations based on local associations in the late 1870s. This was accompanied by a Liberal retreat from the suburbs and, consequently, the middle classes, which was driven by a dissatisfaction and apathy amongst traditional support groups towards Liberal policy. In their place developed a working and middle-class Toryism, driven by a Conservative appeal to patriotism and in favour of improving the social conditions of the people. Although after a long period of prosperity during the mid-nineteenth century the depression of the late 1870s brought economic conditions back into politics after a long absence, this only served to temporarily postpone the end of the period of Liberal dominance until after the election of 1885.

1886-December 1910

The third and final phase of electoral support runs from the General election of 1886 through to that of December 1910, the second contest of the year and the final one to be held before the start of World War One. It is marked by a much closer degree of competition between the two main parties, together with the beginnings of third party representation. Most significantly, the Liberals were no

longer the majority party in terms of their share of the popular vote, with the Tories holding the advantage at six of the seven elections held during this period; in addition, with the exception of the 1895 and 1900 elections, no one party gained more than half of the popular vote. Although taking place only eight months after the previous election, the contest of 1886 reflected the impact of the Third Reform Act much more than its predecessor. Dunbabin (1966: 91) argues that the process of redistribution – the subdivision of the larger seats in particular – had benefited the Conservatives much more than the Liberals, and this built upon an increasing ability to tap into the politics of class and of patriotism. As a consequence the Tories moved into a position of equality in England generally, but in the boroughs more particularly, a move that was accompanied by a stagnation of the Liberal vote.

These longer term factors aside, the emergence of the Irish Home Rule as a significant Parliamentary issue in the period leading up to the 1886 election was pivotal in cementing the Conservative ascendancy during this period. Irish politics had played a significant, if only temporary, role in British politics before. Firstly, in 1834 there had been noteworthy defections to the Tory benches by Whigs in protest against the appropriation of surplus Church of Ireland revenues for secular purposes, severely undermining the sitting Whig government. More recently, the 1872 Ballot Act had had a significant impact, allowing tenants to vote as they wished without reprisal from landlords, thus diminishing the coercive and deference power of the latter and confirming aristocratic discontent with the Liberal administration – nowhere was this more obvious than in Ireland, with the return to Parliament for the first time of 57 Irish Nationalist (Home Rule) MPs. By 1885, nationalist representation had increased to 86, with

the grouping holding the balance of power in Parliament and subsequently playing a major role in bringing about the division of the Liberal party. Thirdly, following the 1880 General election, Gladstone had sought to head off Whig aristocrats suspicious of the Irish land measures through their liberal appointment to his new cabinet. Although radicals now outnumbered Whigs within the Liberal party, they were granted few cabinet seats in an attempt to lessen the possible impact of passing such legislation on party unity (Machin, 2001: 90).

The possibility that an Irish 'issue' could split the Liberals was not, therefore, unexpected. The 1886 election was called following a defeat for the Gladstone government on a Home Rule bill and saw a clear rejection of the proposal by the electorate. Reduced to only 191 seats in the House of Commons, the Liberals had split into two distinct groupings, one a radical and anti-landlord Liberal Party, and another of anti-Home Rule Whigs (Liberal Unionists), many of whom joined with the Conservatives. The next general election in 1892 saw the two main parties move towards a position of virtual parity in terms of their share of the vote but such a position was only temporary. The contest of 1895 saw a second rejection of proposals for home rule by the electorate following the introduction and subsequent failure of a further Home Rule bill in 1893, which combined with public impatience with the Liberal government over its failure to resign following defeat, and resulted in a renewed lead in the popular vote for the Conservatives (see Readman, 1999).

Liberal chaos over Home Rule is, however, only one reason for Conservative electoral success after 1885, although such a contention has dominated the

historiography of the electoral history of the 1890s.¹³ Cornford (1963) typifies this, claiming that it was a negative accomplishment based on 'low turnouts, Liberal disarray and organizational strength', rather than the result of any real positive appeal, while Pugh (1993: 72) characterises the 1895 election as 'essentially a negative reaction ... [which] ... saw Liberal abstentions and Conservative victory by default'. More recently, however, Lawrence (1993; see also Lawrence, 1998) has argued historians have ignored the social aspects of the electoral appeal of the Conservatives, an interpretation developed much further by Readman (1999). He argues, building upon the judgement of Halevy (1951: 4) that 1895 was 'a turning point in the moral and political history of the British people', and the Conservative campaign was crucial in the move toward 'New Liberalism'. The default Tory positions on defending property and the institutions of the realm were 'combined with their championing of working-class popular culture and (more incongruously) with their espousal of social reforms like old-age pensions ... [to create] ... a definite and electorally effective *liberal* message' (Readman, 1999: 491). The Conservative success at the election of 1895 was therefore, arguably, brought about by an appropriation of ideological positions traditionally occupied by the Liberals, although, as Readman also notes, the long-term impact of this was to bring about the renewal of the latter and the end of the 20 year Tory ascendancy after 1886.

There was further growth in the Conservative share of the popular vote at the 1900 election, when an advantage over the Liberals of 4.5 percentage points

¹³ In addition to Cornford (1961), this position is espoused by Cornford (1964), Cornford (1970), Marsh (1978), Green (1985), Green (1995) and Shannon (1996).

was achieved, the biggest lead since the triumph over the Liberals in 1841. This contest coincided with apparent victory in the Boer War and saw Unionists in particular campaign on an unambiguously patriotic platform (Readman, 2001a, 272; see also Readman, 2001b), leading to the notion that it was the 'Khaki' election. Cunningham (1981: 24) contends that this was an extension of the patriotic narrative established in the 1870s where, 'patriotism was firmly identified with Conservatism, militarism, royalism and racialism'.¹⁴ Just as the Conservatives had enjoyed electoral success adopting a more socially liberal platform, so Liberal success at the election of 1906 was built on an embrace of the language of patriotism. As Readman (2001a: 272-3) states,

... the use of such languages became more widespread still. Different and otherwise apparently unrelated questions and controversies were often given a distinctly patriotic spin by Liberal politicians and commentators. Three of the more important of such debates were those over education, tariff reform and land reform.

Although Dunbabin (1966: 96) suggests that an increased turnout played a major part in the Liberal victory, the second of the three areas raised by Readman (2001a: 272-3) also contributed significantly. Proposals to abandon free trade and return to a policy of tariffs to combat intense competition from abroad precipitated a split with the Conservative party and allowed the Liberals to unite around a defence of free trade. Fears that high food prices in particular

¹⁴ He has subsequently questioned the electoral effectiveness of Tory patriotic radicalism, although he does not disagree that they consistently employed or had undisputed control of it. See Cunningham (1986: 288-302).

would result from protective tariffs helped sweep the Liberals to a landslide victory.

By 1910, the Conservative share of the popular vote once again surpassed that of the Liberals, although the latter remained in power by way of having gained the largest share of seats. This year saw two general elections, in January and December, both of which resulted in Liberal victories, although not decisive ones. The first of these had been forced by the Conservative and Liberal Unionist majority in the House of Lords. Ignoring a two hundred year precedent they voted to reject Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' in 1909, with the result that they achieved their aim, 'to try and force a general election which, after the encouragement of several Conservative by-election gains in 1908, they hoped would put them back in power' (Green, 1995: 272). As a direct consequence of their actions the general election campaign was marked by vivid verbal attacks on the Lords by Lloyd George (Machin, 2001: 129-30), together with Unionist attempts to appease the electorate in their Lancashire heartland by abandoning plans for tariff reform and stressing Ireland (Dunbabin, 1980: 241). Although there was a large rise in the number of Unionists returned to Parliament, the Conservative strategy did not succeed, since the Liberals were returned to power again, although with a reduced majority that depended upon the support of the Irish Nationalist and Labour parties for support (Machin, 2001: 130). The election of December 1910 – the final contest of this third period – produced a very similar result in terms of a Parliamentary majority, but there was a small increase in their share of the popular vote while that of the Conservatives remained static.

There is much debate over whether the contests of 1910 were the first in which voting had become class based, an issue closely linked to a second important trend during this third period, namely the emergence of the Labour party within the electoral landscape. Clarke (1969: 322), argues that by this date, 'elections had become class-based in a sense not previously true; that the Liberals gained from this process by winning working-class votes; that Labour's electoral support was not socially distinct from that of the Liberal party'. However, more recently, research on electoral politics has questioned the assertion that voting behaviour is socially determined (see Lawrence and Taylor, 1997, 16-18) – as Lawrence (1993: 631) contends, the constituencies to which voters belonged were, 'not pre-established social blocs awaiting representation but painstakingly constructed ... alliances' (see also Lawrence, 1998).

Electoral Support for Third Parties

Although the Whig/Liberal and Conservative parties dominated the electoral politics of the post-Reform era there were two significant periods in which third parties made some degree of showing. As Figure 1.1 shows the first of these was during the late 1830s and into the 1850s as Chartist candidates stood for election on the radical reform platform provided by the People's Charter. Later, beginning in the 1880s but gathering pace from 1900 onwards, the Labour party began to break through as a significant political force. The emergence of socialist politics culminated in the replacement of the Liberals as one of the two dominant political parties (alongside the Conservatives) by the general election

of 1922, the culmination of a long-term decline that had begun during the 1850s.

In the period between the passage of the First and Second Reform Acts, the Chartists provided the sole opposition to Whig, Liberal or Tory candidates. The origins of the Chartist movement lay in dissatisfaction with the extent of reform in 1832. Its aims were embodied in the People's Charter, a document first drafted in 1836, when it was dismissed as too moderate by radicals, and published and widely circulated from 1838 onwards when it was adopted by the 'common people'.¹⁵ This called for a continued campaign for further, radical Parliamentary reform of the remaining inequities not addressed by the First Reform Act centred on six points: votes for all men, equal-sized electoral districts, abolition of the requirement that MPs be property owners, payment for MPs, annual elections and introduction of the secret ballot. The first Chartist candidates stood at the 1837 general election in three borough constituencies, Ashton-Under-Lyne in Lancashire, Coventry and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, although only the latter achieved a significant share of the vote and all three occupied last position in the poll.

Following this contest the movement gained popular strength, a fact reflected in increased efforts at gaining representation in Parliament. Its support was swelled by the serious economic depression that set in through to the early 1840s which had resulted in a rise in business failures, unemployment and short-time working. The election of 1841 saw eight Chartists stand for election

¹⁵ On Chartism in general see Jones (1975), Taylor (1996), Thompson (1984) and Walton (1999). Royle (1996: 18) addresses the significance of the People's Charter.

in a widely dispersed set of constituencies (Figure 1.2), several of which were traditional centres of support for radical movements, most notably Monmouth in South Wales, Northampton and Glasgow. The pinnacle of electoral success for the Chartist movement arrived in 1847, with an increased number of candidates (ten) achieving the movement's best showing, including the return of the only 'third party' MP in the period between the first two reform acts. This was in Nottingham, leapfrogging two Liberals, while in Ipswich, Northampton and Sheffield significant shares of the vote were also attained. Significantly this election saw the distribution of Chartist candidates in Britain become much more geographically concentrated (Figure 1.3). Although the movement continued to limit itself to borough contests, it no longer had any candidates in Scotland or Wales. Instead they were now to be found in the expanding industrial areas of the north Midlands, North West and Yorkshire or in small, industrial towns such as Tiverton in Devon. It is also important to note that the organising points of the Chartist movement often failed to provide a candidate to stand in the local contest: at no time was there one in Birmingham, only in 1847 did one stand in London, and after 1841 the grouping abandoned South Wales.

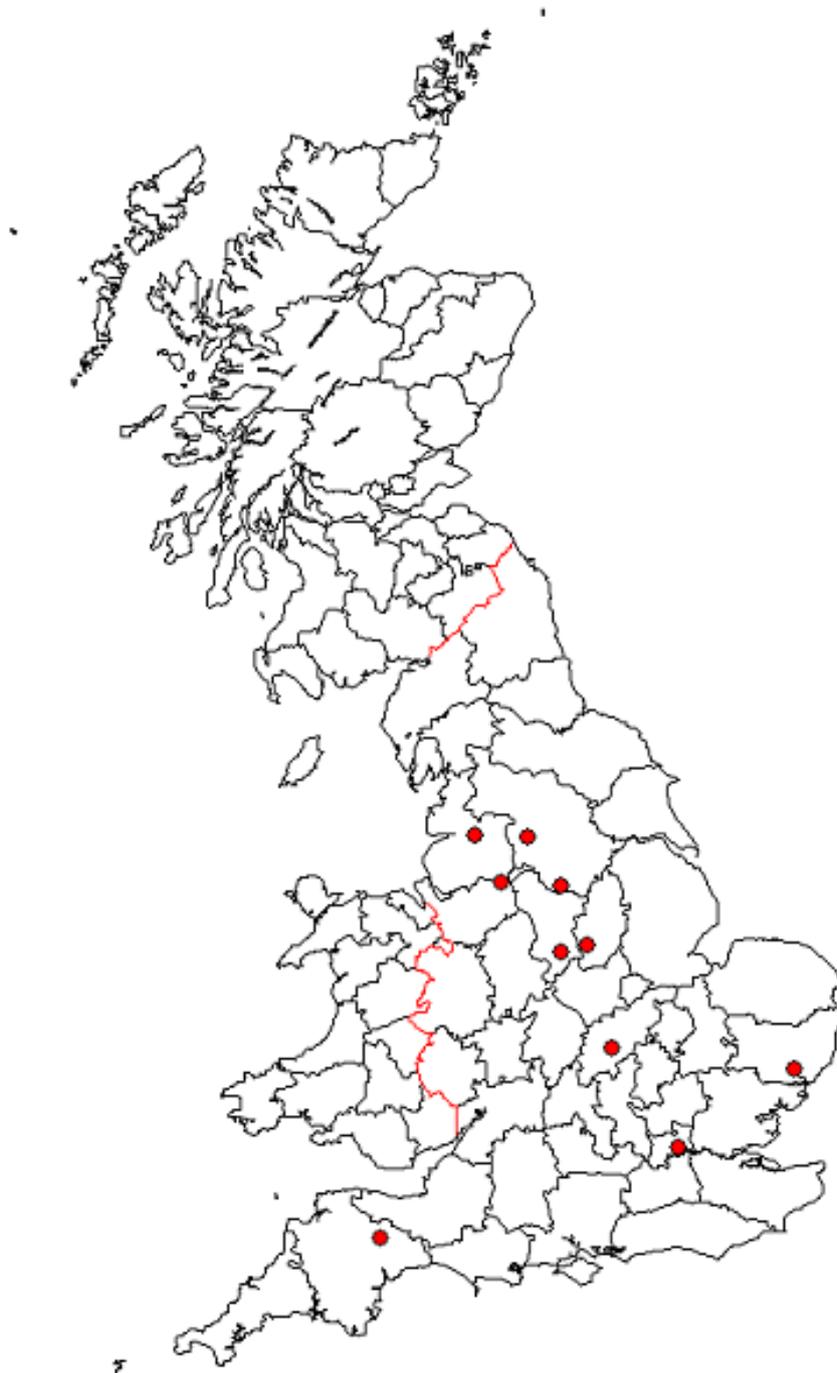
In 1848 the final of three attempts was made to have Parliament consider the People's Charter, but it was withdrawn without a vote (Quinault, 1988: 836-9). This was followed by repressive action by the authorities throughout the country during the next few months, the combination of the two resulting in the Chartist movement losing its position as the leading democratic force in the country just as other radical interventions were occurring in Belgium and France. Its decline was gradual up to its termination as a movement in 1858, and this was mirrored at the polls (see Rallings and Thrasher, 2000: 3-10). From its high point in 1847,

Figure 1.2 Constituencies with Chartist candidates, 1841



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

Figure 1.3 Constituencies with Chartist candidates, 1847



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

only four candidates stood in 1852 and two in 1857, while one also adopted the label in Nottingham in 1859 – a Chartist stronghold throughout the later 1840s and into the 1850s. The overall lack of Parliamentary success for the Chartists can be explained by two factors: its relative extremism and its lack of clarity as a movement. Machin (2001: 34) argues that not only were some of its political demands considered to be too excessive, but so were some of its activities which were easily condemned as subversive and resulted in imprisonment or transportation for some its leaders (Royle, 1996: 16, 90-1). Secondly, Chartism not only had its own causes, the Six Points of the Charter, but it also attracted other, similar radical causes, resulting in a diversity which brought both strength and weakness to the movement, as Walton (1999: 10) contends:

[It was] a lively and assertive movement [that] had been born, providing a common banner under which a variety of existing causes, grievances and organizations could be marshalled, ... fusing together potentially contradictory elements ... in pursuit of a common goal. How it was to be achieved, and what was to be done with it if success were attained, remained highly problematic and divisive issues.

There was no sustained third party presence until the entry of Liberal-Labour candidates from the general election of 1868 onwards, later to be supplemented and then replaced by an emergent Labour party. Ultimately the latter grew to such an extent that it replaced the Liberals as the main alternative to the Conservatives by the 1920s. Conventionally histories of nineteenth-century working-class politics have assumed a disjuncture between the earlier radical Chartist movement and the appearance of the Labour movement, encapsulated in a three-stage model that has become ingrained in both the liberal and,

particularly, the Marxist historiographies of the period. Typified by the work of Thompson (1968) and Hobsbawm (1948) this envisages two distinct forms of politics, revolutionary and reformist, the first existing up until the defeat of Chartism and the second originating with the re-emergence of working-class militancy and socialist politics from the 1870s onwards, culminating in the formation of the class-based Labour Party. The two phases were separated by a 'period of stabilization during the mid-Victorian decades characterized by relative prosperity and political docility among the working-classes' (Lawrence, 1992b: 163) – these intervening decades were, Hobsbawm (1948, 182) argues, 'unlike either what went before or what came after'.

More recently, however, historians of the period have begun to argue that rather than there being a clean break between the two periods of attempts by third parties to break through in the electoral arena, there was instead a much smoother transition between them. Pelling (1965: 7) asserts that it is important not to, 'assume a full generation of quiescence since the days of the Chartists, and to find in the early 1880s a great turning point of working class behaviour. In reality throughout the last half of the century the effective political strength of labour was almost constantly increasing'. The orthodoxy has been assailed on two fronts: firstly, in terms of the relationship between Chartism and the later labour politics (for example Stedman Jones, 1983: 90-178; see also Joyce, 1991; 1994) and secondly, by arguing in favour of greater emphasis on the continuities between Liberal and Labour politics (Clarke, 1978; Biagini and Reid, 1991).¹⁶

¹⁶ There has also been an attempt to develop a middle-ground between the orthodox 'cultural materialist' readings of those such as Thompson and the

Although there was a gap of over forty years between the termination of the Chartist grouping and the birth of the Labour movement, there was only one election, in 1865, where no candidate representing working-class politics stood for election. The presence of Liberal/Labour candidates from 1868 onwards certainly adds weight to the arguments for there being a continuity between, firstly, Chartist and Labour politics and, secondly, Liberal and Labour politics; these individuals are included in Figure 1.1 under the 'other parties' category.¹⁷ In most cases they were nominees of local Liberal and Radical associations but chose to campaign predominately on trade union and labour issues. Many were sponsored by trade unions, while at the general election of 1874 the Labour Representation League supported thirteen of the sixteen candidates and during the 1890s the Miners' Federation of Great Britain funded a significant number (Craig, 1997: xv; Craig, 1974: xvii). Liberal/Labour candidates were to be found on the ballot in an increasing number of borough constituencies in both England and Wales, particularly after the passage of the Third Reform Act. On a few occasions official Liberal candidates opposed them and, following the formation

linguistic turn adopted by Stedman Jones and Joyce, exemplified by Epstein (2003).

¹⁷ There were also parties such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) that increasingly recognised the need to redefine the relationship between radicalism and the working-classes in order to combat the advance of urban Toryism. The SDF sought to embrace this agenda whilst still retaining significant elements of traditional Radicalism – in some sense the origins of socialist organisations that subscribed to this agenda were actually non-socialist. See Lawrence (1992: 175-9).

of the Labour Party in 1900, some became official Labour candidates while others remained Liberals. In addition to Liberal-Labour candidates, Scotland saw eleven socialist candidates stand for election in 1892, with smaller numbers at subsequent elections. These represented the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party, Scottish Socialist Federation and the Scottish United Trades Council Labour Party, but were limited to the larger towns and cities such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The Labour party itself began to emerge into the electoral arena from the 1900 general election onwards following the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to co-ordinate attempts to elect to Parliament candidates sponsored by the trade unions.¹⁸ Table 1.1, below, summarises the performance of Labour candidates from this election onwards, and includes the contests of 1918 and 1922 for comparison. Although the 1900 election saw the return of two candidates it was too soon for the new organisation to campaign effectively on behalf of all fifteen; instead it found support increase after the election because of the actions of the Conservative government over the Taff Vale case (see McCord, 1993). In the 1906 election the LRC won 29 seats following a substantial increase in its share of the vote, the latter helped by a pact with the Liberals that aimed at avoiding Labour/Liberal contests in the interest of removing the Conservatives from office. The two elections of 1910 saw a significant rise in the number of Labour candidates elected to Parliament, but as the table shows, the party did not truly break through until after the

¹⁸ The classic history of the Labour movement is Pelling (1965). See also Tanner (1990) on the changes in Liberal and Labour politics between 1900 and 1918.

passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act. Prior to this fourth reform of the franchise and registration system, a majority of the electorate likely to support Labour was excluded from voting so its actual support was much higher than its election results indicate during the 1890s and 1900s (Dunbabin, 1966: 96; Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, 1976).

Table 1.1 Labour Party performance at British general elections, 1895-1922

Election	Total Votes	Share of Vote (%)	Candidates	Elected	Share of MPs (%)
1895 ¹⁹	44,325	1.2	28	0	
1900	62,698	1.9	15	2	0.3
1906	317,047	5.8	49	29	7.3
January 1910	501,706	7.8	77	40	6.0
December 1910	371,802	7.4	56	42	6.3
1918	2,245,777	23.0	361	57	8.5
1922	4,237,349	29.9	414	142	23.1

Source: Derived from Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 71-2)

The decline in Liberalism during the third phase of electoral politics played a significant part in the rise of Labour, alongside the increasing strength of trade unionism. In areas such as London, traditional Liberalism declined from the

¹⁹ Labour candidates at the 1895 general election stood under the banner of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). This was not affiliated to the Labour party until the election of 1900, so candidates were not officially endorsed Labour candidates, although after this date they customarily were. There were four by-elections where ILP candidates went forward without Labour Party endorsement (see Craig, 1974: xvi).

1890s onwards because of its unwillingness to make concessions to demands for greater labour representation or to adopt the more progressive social policies associated with New Liberalism (Thompson, 1964; on this trend in general see Laybourn, 1995). Other areas, such as Lancashire adopted a different strategy, with local Liberals choosing to form an alliance with Labour candidates to shore up the weak position they occupied. Such co-operation acted to unite the sectional trade union interests of Labour with the broader appeal of the Liberals in a progressive alliance to combat the increasing strength of the Tories (Clarke, 1971: 311-339; Moore, 2001; Powell 1986a).

Stability and Change at Nineteenth-Century Elections

The extent of Liberal-Conservative competition, as well as the impact of the emergence of third party alternatives, can be captured by two indicators of long-term net electoral change. Swing and volatility are both calculated using the national distribution of votes between successive elections. The former is a measure of the net change in support for the two main parties in a pair of elections – in this case the Liberals and the Conservatives.²⁰ Across the whole country there was a 22 per cent swing from the Liberals to the Conservatives between 1832 and December 1910, as would be expected since the gap in popular vote shares gradually narrowed during this period. This, however, hides a more subtle shift in the distribution of votes. During the first period of electoral politics outlined above (1832-1857 inclusive), there was a swing towards the

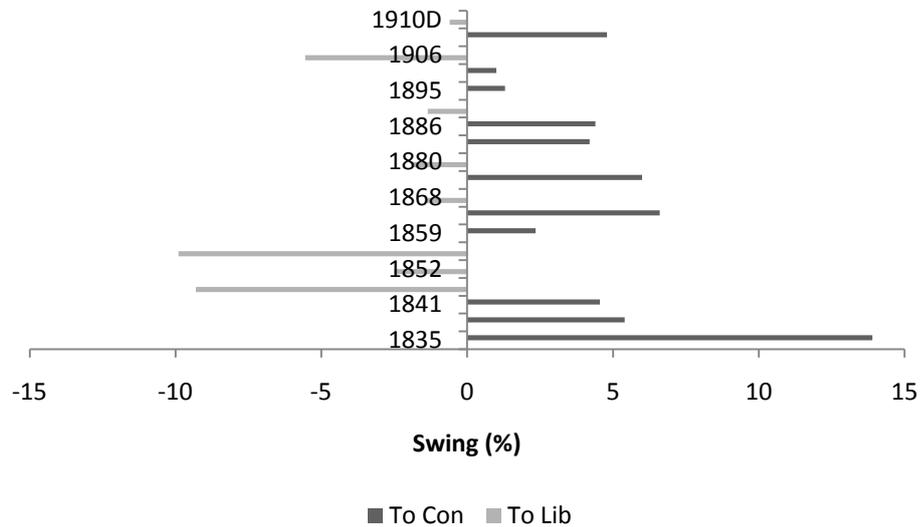
²⁰ Throughout this thesis the model of swing developed by Butler (1954: 180-7) has been used to calculate swing from the nineteenth-century results.

Tories of 2.2 per cent despite the Liberals beginning and ending the period with the two largest shares of the vote they would ever achieve during the post-Reform era. Following this, between 1859 and 1885, there was a much greater shift in support for the two parties, with a swing of 13.5 per cent towards the Conservatives. Following the Third Reform Act the situation reverted in favour of the Liberals, although only slightly, with a swing of 0.4 per cent in their favour, although not enough to reverse the advances made by the Conservatives in the earlier, first period up to 1857.

As Figure 1.4 shows, the majority of the largest swings in the distribution of votes were in favour of the Conservatives. Following their record defeat (in terms of vote share) in 1832, a swing of 13.9 per cent to the Tories began to undo the position of strength occupied by the Liberals, and this trend was consolidated in 1841 and 1847 with further swings of 5.4 per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively. Although these steps resulted in a Conservative victory in the general election of 1841, they were followed by a change of direction in favour of the Liberals, with swings of 9.3 per cent and 9.9 per cent in 1847 and 1852, resulting in the restoration of their ascendant position. From 1859 there was a more decisive shift in the distribution of votes between the two parties. The period saw a swing of 13.5 per cent from the Liberals to the Tories, a figure achieved through a series of sizeable swings in 1859, 1865, 1874 and 1885; these were punctuated by small swings of less than two per cent back towards the Liberals in 1868 and 1880. This general pattern is confirmed by Dunbabin

(1966: 85-9), who calculates the levels of swing annually for the period between 1868 and 1885 based on the results of by-elections.²¹

Figure 1.4 Butler swing at general elections in Britain, 1835-December 1910



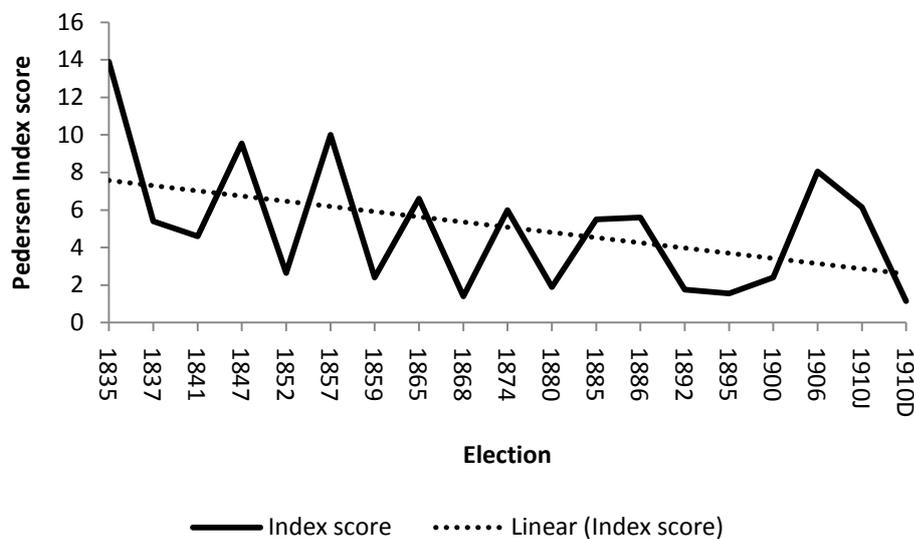
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Beginning with the 1886 general election, the net volatility in Britain as a whole became much less extreme, reflecting the much closer vote shares the Conservatives and Liberals were attaining. Although the swing towards the Conservatives in 1886 was slightly larger than that of the previous election, it was followed by three successive contests at which only small numbers of votes were traded. In particular, the swings of 1895 and 1900 reflected the steady, sustained resurgence of the Tories. The 5.6 per cent swing towards the Liberals in 1906 indicates the extent to which the Tories were rejected by the electorate,

²¹ Although it should be noted that many of her calculations are based on a very small number of contests – just three in 1872 and 1879, for example (see Dunbabin, 1966, 85-6).

and was the largest swing against them since the election of 1857, although it was soon reversed in January 1910. Overall, the cumulative effect of successive elections during the post-Reform era was to progressively switch the electoral momentum towards the Tories, gradually undermining the advantageous position of the Liberals in terms of their share of the vote.

Figure 1.5 Electoral volatility at elections in Britain, 1835-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Swing is, however, a measure of net electoral change for the two main parties only – if all parties are to be taken into account a different index is required. The Pedersen Index (Pedersen, 1979), originally developed to analyse the stability of party systems revealed by election results, is one such measure of overall electoral change, revealing to what extent party strength is being reallocated from one election to the next between losing and winning parties. Figure 1.5 shows the index scores for the period between the elections of 1835 and December 1910; the closer the index score is to zero the lower the level of

electoral change.²² It is clear that the volatility of elections declined substantially over the period, approximately halving.

As with swing, several key trends are apparent, corresponding in the main with significant swings in support for the Liberal and Conservative parties. Firstly, there was a decline in volatility up to the Conservative victory of 1841 and a subsequent rise as the Liberals reasserted themselves in the popular vote share, a trend that also coincides with the Chartist presence in 1847 and the peak in the index that year. Second, between 1859 and 1885 the index scores gradually declined as the gap between the two main parties in the popular vote closed and, finally, a peak in 1906 as a result of the landslide Liberal victory of that year. Alongside this, elections such as those in 1892, 1895, 1900 and December 1910 appear less significant – and, as a result, the electoral system more stable – but each was still an important contest in the post-Third Reform Act period, as suggested above.

Summary

Between the general elections of 1832 and December 1910 there were significant developments in the electoral politics of Britain. Firstly, Liberal dominance, measured in terms of their share of the popular vote, was progressively eroded by the Conservatives – this is underlined by the 22 per cent swing away from the Liberals to the Tories over the period. This did not begin in earnest until the 1860s; until then the success of 1841 was their sole

²² The average Pedersen Index score for the period 1835 to December 1910 is 5.1. This compares to 6.4 for the post-1945 era.

election victory of the post-Reform period as issues such as the split over the Corn Laws rendered the Conservatives unelectable. By the election of 1886, however, the two parties were increasingly closely matched, a situation brought about through the development of more modern party organisations, an effort to reach out to the new middle-classes and the deployment of distinctive patriotic narratives in electioneering. These combined with other social and economic events, the existence of which do not conform to the traditional divisions applied to nineteenth-century politics that are provided by the reform acts and introduction of the secret ballot, to bring about the decline of the Liberals.

Secondly, despite the dominance of the electoral arena by the Liberals and Conservatives there was a distinctive third element to the party system, provided first by the Chartists and later by the development of the Labour movement. This grew in size from 1895 onwards because of a variety of factors: the rise of trade unionism, the failure of Liberalism in general to address working-class issues and the treatment of them by the Tories and through a progressive alliance with New Liberal candidates. However, as the following chapter demonstrates, while these long-term trends are crucial to understanding national patterns of political support, they also possessed a distinctive regional and local geography. Without understanding this, it is impossible to appreciate the fundamental complexities of the geographies of electioneering and campaign expenditure and how they developed over time.

Chapter 2

The Electoral Geographies of Contested and Uncontested Seats

Having examined the main developments that shaped the electoral politics of the nineteenth century, this chapter will focus on how these translated into a geography of support. Psephological studies of nineteenth-century voting are dominated by considerations of voter preferences, party allegiances, national and local political cultures, and the relationships between local social and economic factors and patterns in electoral behaviour. The focus has therefore been on voting behaviour rather than its geographies (for a review of this tendency see Lawrence and Taylor, 1997: 1-26). One of the most significant features of the nineteenth-century electoral system, however, was the emergence of a regional divide in voting at elections beginning in 1885, despite the Liberals and the Conservatives achieving almost identical shares of the popular vote. Although there have been many studies of local voting patterns, with the exception of Kinnear (1981) and Pelling (1967), there have been few studies of the regional patterns of party support.¹

¹ There have been many local studies of electoral behaviour but among the most significant are Dawson (1995) on Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, Davis (1972) on Buckinghamshire, Howarth (1969) on the Liberal revival in Northamptonshire, Olney (1973) on Lincolnshire and Thompson (1964) on London.

The chapter begins by looking at the development of these regional patterns, and examines whether the changing geography of the support for each of the political parties within Britain represented the development of a north-south divide within British politics. Second, the chapter elaborates on the spatial patterns of voting in the three types of constituency – the borough, the county and the university – where it is possible to identify a more subtle pattern of support for parties within regions in different types of constituency. Examinations of nineteenth-century politics have concentrated on constituencies that were actually contested, but as the final section of the chapter argues, the seats that were left uncontested – an important feature of the electoral landscape – were just as significant; the reasons why constituencies were left uncontested, their geography and the extent to which particular parties benefited are outlined. Although the chapter concentrates predominately on the contests that followed the Third Reform Act, when the introduction of single-member districts in almost all constituencies makes analysis simpler, where possible connections are made to elections that occurred before 1884.

Regional Voting

To analyse regional voting patterns this study divides England into nine regions – East, East Midlands, North, North West, South East, South Midlands, South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire – while Scotland and Wales are defined as separate regions (see Appendix C for the constituent counties of each region). The schema is broadly based on that developed by Pelling (1967), itself a

development of an earlier division of the country by Fawcett (1919).² Pelling's scheme was based on the uniform statistical divisions introduced for the purposes of the 1851 Census. Although these divisions – 16 in all (13 in England, one in Wales and two in Scotland) – were partly based on historic areas, according to Butlin (1990: 239-40) they were determined more by a desire to standardise these areas for statistical purposes (see also Freeman, 1968).

Despite the arguably artificial nature of these boundaries, however, some very clear regional patterns can be discerned. These are illustrated, first, in Table 2.1 which shows, for the general elections of 1885 and December 1910, the Conservative 'lead' (in some cases negative) in terms of the share of the vote over the Liberals in regions. Despite trailing the Liberals by only a few percentage points nationally in 1885, there was a clear anti-Tory sentiment not only in Scotland and Wales, but also in many areas of England. This was particularly the case in the northernmost counties of Cumberland, Northumberland and Westmorland (the 'North'), Yorkshire and the East Midlands. The Conservatives achieved a larger share of the vote than the Liberals in only three regions: the industrial heartlands of the North West and West Midlands – although here they held only the barest of 'leads' – together with the south eastern counties around London. Overall, therefore, the Liberals dominated the regional geography of voting in 1885.

² For a discussion of regionalism in nineteenth-century Britain see Butlin (1990: 239-50). The classic work on regionalism during the industrial revolution is Langton (1984).

Table 2.1 Conservative lead over Liberals in regions, 1885 and December 1910

	Conservative lead	
	1885	December 1910
Scotland	-16.1	-10.6
Wales	-24.1	-10.4
North	-15.8	3.8
North West	9.9	11.9
Yorkshire	-13.8	-3.8
East	-2.7	-1.5
East Midlands	-17.3	-0.6
South East	12.6	16.7
South Midlands	-6.6	0.2
South West	-6.9	4
West Midlands	0.1	6.7
Great Britain	-3.4	4.5

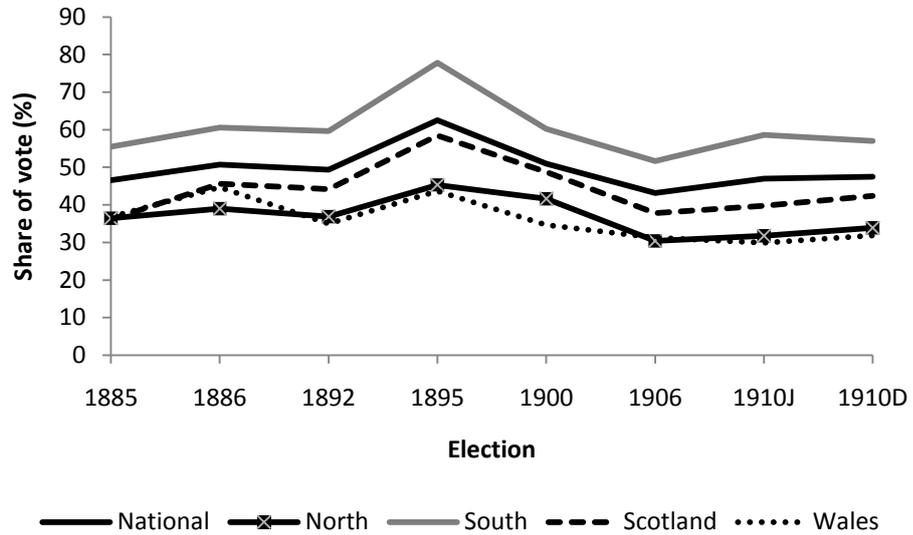
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

By the general election of 1910 this was no longer the case. Nationally, the situation has reversed with the Tories leading in the popular vote, the result of significant changes in the regional distribution of party support. Firstly, the Conservatives consolidated their support in the North West, South East and, in particular, the West Midlands. More significantly, however, major inroads were made into the Liberal vote across England. In the South Midlands, the region immediately to the north of London, and the South West, negative leads in 1885 were converted into substantial leads, creating a strong southern core of Conservative support. Additionally, in more peripheral areas such as the North and Yorkshire the margin between the two parties was greatly reduced, as it was in the East Midlands. In Scotland and Wales the Liberals were still the ascendant party, although in the latter nation in particular their advantage over

the Tories had been more than halved. The 25 years between 1885 and December 1910 therefore saw the retreat of the Liberal party and the establishment of an increasingly clear 'North-South' divide in patterns of party support.

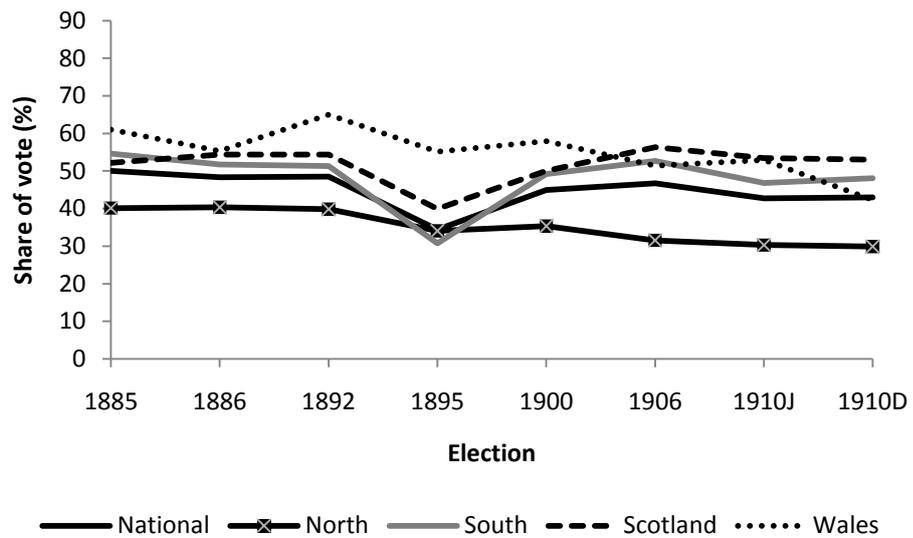
A summary picture of what happened between these two elections, in terms of regional voting patterns, is given in Figures 2.1 through to 2.4. These show, for each election, the share of the vote the Conservative, Liberal, Labour and 'other' parties achieved in Britain as a whole, Scotland, Wales and the regions of England, with these grouped together into two larger regions, the north and south (see Appendix C). Figure 2.1 focuses on support for the Conservatives and reveals a distinctive geography to their support. The high points in 1895 and 1900 correspond with the revival in Tory fortunes at the last contest of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, while the low point in 1906 correspond with the Liberal landslide in that particular general election. The distribution of support for the Conservatives was markedly higher than their national share of the vote in the south of England. It was here that the roots of the Tory resurgence during the final decade of the nineteenth century lay, with a much greater increase in their share of the popular vote between the general elections of 1892 and 1895 occurring here than elsewhere. Although the Conservative vote share in Scotland was near that achieved in Britain as a whole, few inroads were made into either Wales or the north of England. In fact, support for the party progressively declined in these two specific areas following the Third Reform Act, despite Tory candidates enjoying electoral success in the North West, as outlined above. These two contrasting trends, however, serve to highlight that Conservative support in the region was far from widespread, being

Figure 2.1 Regional variations in Conservative vote share, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 2.2 Regional variations in Liberal vote share, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

disproportionately concentrated in just a small number of constituencies.

The distribution of support for Liberal candidates (Figure 2.2) differs in two particular ways from that of the Conservatives. Firstly, the Liberal share of the vote in each of the regions is located much closer to their national vote share, suggesting a more widespread distribution of voters. That said, however, it is clear that Scotland and, in particular, Wales were Liberal strongholds, whereas the North of England was a region in which Liberal candidates, as with their Tory counterparts, by comparison underperformed and their share of the vote gradually declined over the period. The Liberal performance in the south of England was only slightly better than their performance in Britain as a whole and was the region in which the backlash against the party, and the subsequent Tory revival, at the general election of 1895 was felt most severely.

Throughout the period there is, therefore, clear evidence that the regions of Britain were beginning to diverge politically. There is a large body of literature that examines the existence of a 'North-South' electoral divide in Britain (see, for example, Curtice and Steed, 1982, 1986; Johnston et al., 1988; Pattie, et al., 1993), and which suggests that this new cleavage developed first during the 1950s, before becoming clearer during the 1980s (Heath et al., 1991).³ Its development is attributed to a variety of factors, including long-term changes in the distribution of the socio-economic characteristics among the electorate, uneven regional economic development and the rise of third parties. A distinctive regional geography of party support was clearly emerging much earlier than these explanations allow for, however. Rose (1974: 490)

³ Johnston and Pattie (2006: 82-7) provide an overview of research into the north-south divide in voting patterns from the 1980s onwards.

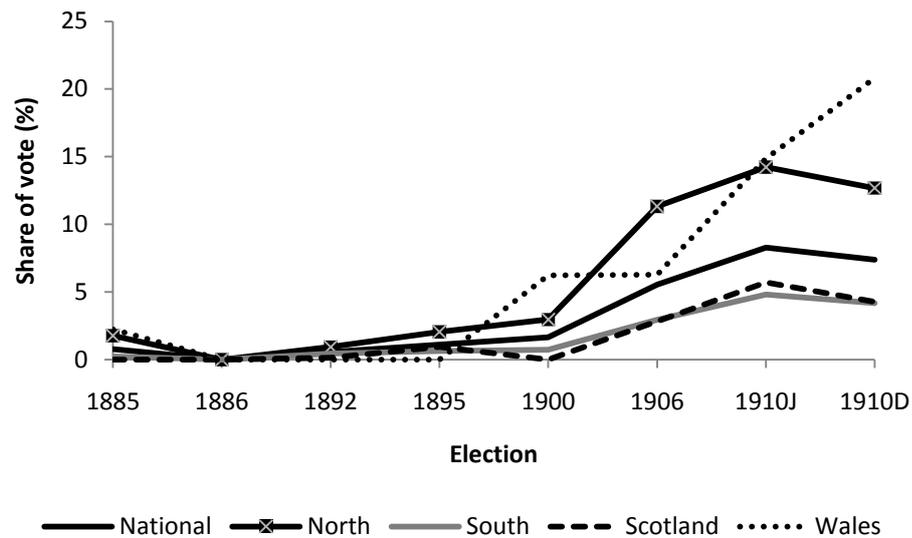
demonstrates that the regional pattern of Conservative support in 1970 was very similar in every election stretching right back to 1918, while Field (1997: 34-7) contends that the North-South divide in Conservative support originated earlier still, at the general election of 1886, and then steadily developed to the extent that the December 1910 general election was one of the most geographically polarised of the eight contests between the Third Reform Act and World War One (Field, 1997: 52-3). Furthermore, Field (1997: 58) argues that the regional electoral divide that emerged during the 1950s was not a new phenomenon but rather the re-emergence of the nineteenth-century cleavage that had laid dormant during the interwar period.

Third Parties and Peripheral Electoral Politics

Therefore, the distributions of electoral support for the Conservative and Liberal parties outlined above were to provide the backdrop to the electoral politics of the twentieth century in addition to creating the electoral battlegrounds of the nineteenth. With this point in mind it is important to also consider the emergence of 'third' parties following the Third Reform Act, not least the emergence of the Labour party. This is especially significant because of the geographically concentrated nature of its support that adds an extra dimension to the core-periphery model proposed by Field. Figure 2.3 shows the regional vote shares achieved by those candidates standing as representatives of the official Labour party. Firstly, it is clear that the strength was concentrated in two specific areas, the north of England and Wales, where the party achieved shares of the vote that were in excess of its national performance; in the south

of England and Scotland Labour made few inroads, and fewer candidates stood for election, achieving no more than five per cent of the vote.

Figure 2.3 Regional variations in Labour vote share, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The growth of the Labour party was central to the decay of the Liberal party in the northern region of England. The share of the vote that the latter achieved steadily declined from 1885 onwards, while that of the Conservatives only rose by a few percentage points. However, despite this, the Tories managed to convert a substantial Liberal 'lead' in the region into a slim majority in their favour. A key factor in bringing about this situation was the emergence of the Labour party in the north, as opposed to a surge in electoral support for the Tories. The Liberals were pushed further towards the periphery by the arrival of a significant 'third party' that derived its votes almost entirely from them alone.

A similar trend can be seen in Wales, an area that Table 2.1 suggests is very much a Liberal stronghold throughout the period between the general elections of 1885 and December 1910.⁴ At the beginning of the post-Reform era in 1832 electoral support in the country was evenly divided between the two main parties, with many of the western counties and small boroughs leaning heavily towards the Tories, while much of the eastern half possessed a Liberal outlook. The mid-nineteenth century, however, marked an important turning point as the domination of politics by the landed families was increasingly challenged before eventually being supplanted by the influence of Nonconformism. As Snell and Eil (2000: 171-2) show there was a close correlation between the distribution of support for the Liberal and Labour parties and the geography of Nonconformity.⁵ This was the result of a combination of reasons, including the

⁴ Morgan (1970) provides a comprehensive overview of the history of politics both in Wales and of Wales at Westminster. The decline of the role and the influence of the gentry, and the consequent fall in Conservative support is covered by Cragoe (1995) and Hanham (1978: 155-87). Cragoe (1996) also examines the operation of Nonconformist ministers in electoral politics. On the Labour party in Welsh politics see Morgan (1973), Parry (1970), Tanner, Williams and Hopkin (2000), and Williams (1996). There a range of local studies of electoral politics in Wales during the nineteenth century, among them Cleaver (1985), Jones (1961), Jones (1968), Matthews (1999), and Morgan (1967; 1992).

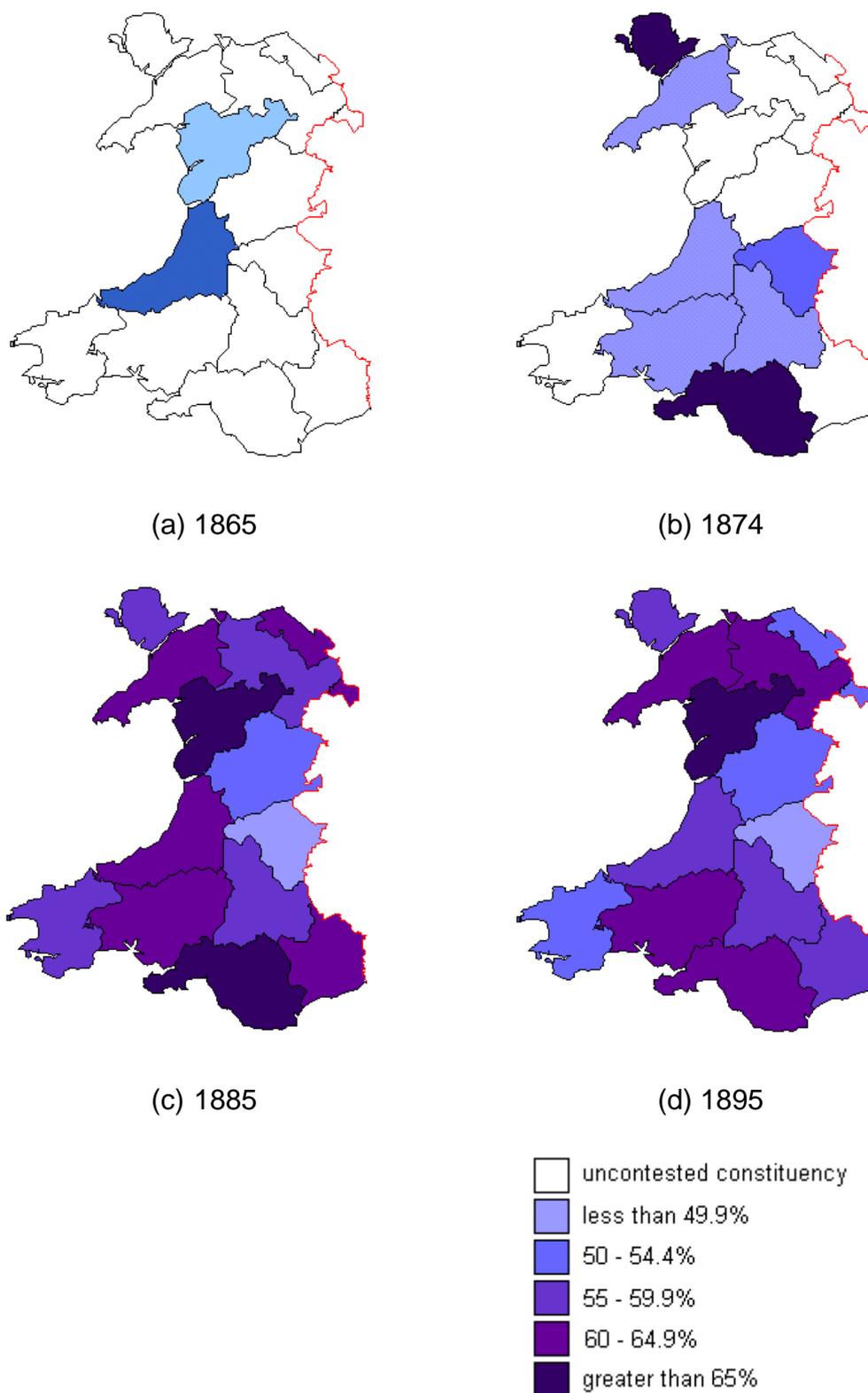
⁵ Although as they themselves point out, 'any discussion of the political propensities of religious groups is a matter of *tendencies*' (Snell and Eil, 2000: 74). A similar point is made by Wald (1983: 59) and as Phillips (1992: 277)

withdrawal from public life of the gentry creating a void into which Nonconformist ministers could step, migration from rural areas into the coalfields and the creation of a popular martyrology that focused on the retaliative acts of Tory landlords against dissenting voters during the 1830s in particular.⁶ The general elections of 1885 and 1886 marked the highpoint of Liberal politics, the former being the 'annus mirabilis for Welsh liberalism' (Morgan, 1970: 65), while the latter contest was the 'most decisive ever held in Wales [...] [I]t greatly advanced the cause of Liberals in Wales (Morgan, 1970: 72-4). The changing electoral fortunes of the Liberal party are reflected in Figure 2.4 which maps the Liberal share of the vote in every county which saw a contested election at roughly ten year intervals, beginning with the election of 1865. Starting in 1874, Liberalism was geographically polarised with its main areas of strength in the north of the country in Anglesey and in the south in Glamorgan, the main industrial area. By 1885, however, support for the Liberals had become much more widespread, with significant shares of the vote attained

points out: 'religion was one of many group interests that affected electoral behaviour'. Nevertheless, the links between Nonconformism and electoral politics in Wales were wide and deep – see Cragoe (1996). Snell and Eil (2000: 74-7) highlight that there is a similar relationship between the Tory voting patterns and the geography of the Anglican church. For the debate on the electoral significance of religion see Bebbington (1984), Blewett (1972), Clarke (1972), Dunbabin (1980), Pelling (1967), and Wald (1983),

⁶ As Cragoe (1996: 170) notes, 'the coercion of Liberal tenants by Conservative landlords has a secure place in the historiographical canon'.

Figure 2.4 The Liberal share of the vote in Wales, 1865-95



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

in the counties of mid-Wales such as Breconshire, Cardiganshire and Merioneth.

Thereafter, however, Liberalism was increasingly squeezed on two fronts. Firstly, the increase in support for Labour, as shown in Figure 2.3, was located specifically in the southern, coal mining areas of the country. Here, Morgan (1970: 210-11) argues, Liberalism retreated because the issues around which it was focused – disestablishment, land reform and education amongst others – were those of the countryside and not those of the new industrial communities. In addition, there was a growing sense that Liberalism took the loyalty of its voters for granted and was reluctant to adopt working-class men as candidates (Hopkin, 2000: 45). Secondly, the counties bordering the English border saw a resurgence in Conservative support, a trend that was already noticeable in 1895, with the Liberals achieving lower shares of the vote in counties such as Radnorshire, Denbigh and Montgomeryshire than elsewhere in the country. The combination of these two factors suggests that while the core-periphery model proposed by Field holds true, Wales was not the electoral stronghold that the Figures in Table 2.1 suggests. An increasing 'anglicanisation' (Morgan, 1970: 5) of the areas nearest to English border is indicative of a Conservative core that extended beyond southern England alone. The result of this was that in Wales Liberal support was pushed even further towards the peripheral, coastal regions, a trend reinforced further by the rise of the Labour party in the south of the country increasingly forcing it out of the newly industrialising areas.

The other key peripheral area for the Liberal party was Scotland where, as in Wales, a substantial lead was maintained over the Conservatives. Support for the party was, however, located more heavily and extensively in the east of the

country, although smaller majorities were still achieved in constituencies in the west. Such dominance was facilitated by a number of factors. These included the mechanics of party organisation, where the Liberals were far more united, particularly after 1874, than either the Conservatives in Scotland or the Liberals in England and Wales (Kellas, 1965). This was reinforced both by a strong association between Liberalism and key issues, such as national patriotism, and ecclesiastical concerns, including temperance (Hanham, 1978: 155-69). On only a few occasions prior to the Third Reform Act was the Liberal dominance of Scottish politics challenged, in particular by the initial neglect of the concerns of crofters during the agricultural depression. A direct consequence of this was the election of 'radical' crofter candidates in several constituencies at the 1885 general election, all except one of who ousted orthodox Liberal MPs; by 1892, following the passage of the Crofter Acts in 1886, all of these candidates had themselves become conventional Liberal members (Crowley, 1956; Savage, 1961).

The Home Rule Crisis, however, marked a significant turning point in Liberal fortunes in Scotland. The varying levels of support between the two halves of the country for the Liberals had mirrored the different tendencies of the two main party organisations in the country, the west Scotland Liberal organisation centred on Glasgow being much more radical in its membership than the Whig dominated organisation in Edinburgh (Kellas, 1965: 9). At the 1886 general election 27 Unionist MPs (17 of whom were Liberal Unionists) were returned to Parliament from Scotland, the worst result for the Liberals since the First Reform Act. The strong support for these candidates was, Hutchison (1986: 162-4) argues, derived from the religious bond between Irish and Scottish

Presbyterianism, as well as the close economic relations – both agricultural and industrial – between Ulster and the western lowlands. Although Home Rule became much less of an issue in Scottish politics by 1895, it provided much of the impetus for the Conservative electoral revival from the final decade of the nineteenth century onwards. The disappearance of Crofter concerns and the re-establishment of the Tory ascendancy in the more rural areas also aided this, together with the failure of the Labour party to make anything like the impact it had in either northern England or Wales and Scotland.

National or Regional Politics?

Although concentrated in England, Conservative support was by no means uniformly distributed across the country. As in Wales there was a close resemblance between areas of Conservative strength and the predominant religious tendency, in this case Anglicanism (Snell and Eil, 2000: 54-77), although a range of other socio-economic influences were also key determinants.⁷ In addition, there was also a further reproduction of the core-periphery model within England itself. Conservative support was at its highest in the South East in both 1885 and December 1910 (Table 2.1), while the Liberal lead was maintained in only the East, the East Midlands and Yorkshire, and the party was only within four per cent of the Tories in the North, the South Midlands, and the South West. As was the case in both Wales and Scotland, the majority of electoral contests were straight fights between these two parties,

⁷ See above, note 2.

although in the North West an increasing number of three way contests took place where Labour candidates also stood.

Table 2.2 Regional Swings, 1885-December 1910

	Election						
	1886	1892	1895	1900	1906	Jan. 1910	Dec. 1910
Scotland	3.7	-0.7	14.4	-9.9	-8.7	2.4	1.5
Wales	6.7	-9.6	9.2	-5.9	1.6	-1.4	6.3
East	5.9	-4.2	22.2	-17.8	-9.6	6.9	-2.7
East Midlands	2.8	3.3	13.4	-10.0	-3.4	2.8	-0.5
North	4.1	-2.8	11.7	-3.1	-3.3	2.8	0.4
North West	-1.5	-0.4	16.9	-12.8	-6.2	3.5	1.4
South East	3.7	-1.8	7.5	-4.3	-9.9	8.0	-1.2
South Midlands	4.8	-0.7	30.7	-29.7	-4.6	5.0	-2.0
South West	12.3	-6.9	22.1	-23.1	-5.2	4.4	1.7
West Midlands	-0.1	4.1	15.9	-16.0	-0.8	4.1	-3.8
Yorkshire	2.7	0.7	9.8	-6.3	-3.7	0.3	1.5
Great Britain	2.9	-0.8	13.6	-11.0	-4.8	3.9	0.2

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

All these factors tend to suggest that the electoral politics of the nineteenth century were essentially regional. Clearly, as outlined above, the responses to national issues were played out across national and regional divides in the varying distribution of support for both the major and minor political parties. Conventionally the assumption has been that up until approximately the election of 1979, there was near uniformity in swing across the country, regardless of nation or region. As Crewe (1985: 101-3) puts it, 'to know the swing in Cornwall was to know, within a percentage point or two, the swing in the Highlands; to know the results of the first three constituencies to declare on election night was to know not only which party had won – but by how many seats'. This

contention is, however, challenged by the evidence contained in Table 2.2 which suggests a pattern of regional diversity in the amount of net electoral change between the two main parties. Using the regions of England as a measure of regionalism, plus the nations of Scotland and Wales, the table shows the Conservative-Liberal swing for each election between 1885 and December 1910 inclusive; a positive figure denotes a swing to the Conservatives, a negative figure one to the Liberals.

Firstly, it is clear that that both the extent and direction of swing varied between regions. In 1892, for example, the small swing towards the Liberals nationally was founded on some very large movements in Wales and peripheral areas of England such as the South West and the East, while other areas saw vote transfers that were broadly in line with the national trend. Several regions ran counter to the trend, resulting in a swing towards the Conservatives – specifically the East Midlands, South West and Yorkshire. Secondly, the regional variation in certain areas was much less or much greater than others, in the main because of the concentration of support for a particular party in that region. The general election of 1895 aside, the core Liberal regions – including Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire – rarely saw their levels of swing exceed the national figure. The largest Conservative gains were concentrated in its heartland areas in southern England (specifically the South Midlands, South West and West Midlands) and the North West, a reflection of the pre-existing concentration of support in these areas. Finally, it is clear that at certain elections particular regions became key to overall electoral success. The Conservative victory of 1900 was built on the foundations laid in 1895 when there were large swings in their favour across the country, including in non-

traditional regions such as Scotland and Wales. Similarly, the Liberal landslide of 1906 was a consequence of the clawing back of many of the Conservative gains during the 1900 election in areas that previously were very strongly Tory, as well as increasing their share of the vote in areas where they were traditionally the strongest. Clearly, therefore the notion of a uniform national swing does not hold for the period after the Third Reform Act. Although in general the direction of swing in the regions was the same as that nationally, there were broad variations in the net change in electoral support for the two main parties.

Voting in the Constituencies

Although there was clearly a distinct geography to voting within Britain, the foundations of this lay in the range of different constituencies that existed within England, Scotland and Wales. These were created because of the evolution of around nine – the exact number is disputed (Blewett, 1965: 30-1) – different franchises under which a person might qualify to vote, and resulted in three distinct types of constituency: the borough, the county and the university. Because of the multitude of different franchises it was entirely possible for one individual to qualify under more than one and to hold a vote in more than one constituency – university seats are the prime example of this (Blewett, 1965: 49-50).

Conventionally it is assumed that the strength of the Conservative party during the nineteenth century lay in two particular areas: the smaller boroughs and in rural counties of England. Both types of constituency were areas where

the party could exploit the traditional deferential links between the patron landowner, key local individuals and the tenant elector. Lynch (2000:6), for example, argues that, '[the] Conservative party, favoured by the gentry, many farmers, and the village clergy, tended to dominate politics in a majority of rural divisions both before mass enfranchisement and after'. In contrast, the Liberals are seen as a party that relied upon urban areas, particularly the larger, newly industrialised areas, for their support because of the linkages between the influence that could be exerted by local employers on their workforces.

Additionally, the anti-landlord tendencies of Scottish and Welsh county politics allowed the Liberals to exploit the vacuum created by the inability of landowners to exercise political control as they did in England (Hanham, 1978: 23). In a similar manner to the Liberal party, the origins of the Labour party are seen not in the countryside, but in the urban, industrial regions of England and Wales.

It is not so clear, however, that each party targeted the electorate in its key constituency type when drawing up, proposing and enacting policy. Lynch (2000: 3) argues that the Conservatives clearly had their rural householder base in mind when moving to promote allotments and small holdings in 1887 or to set up democratically elected county councils in 1888. She continues that, '[a]n even more striking example of interest in the rural vote can be found in the fact that the Liberal party, despite its traditional associations with the cities, conducted a number of major electoral campaigns ... on the subject of land reform' (Lynch, 2000: 3), although clearly just because land reform is a rural focused policy does not mean it was inconsistent with urban viewpoints.

A more convincing argument in favour of the rural-urban divide between the two parties has been proposed by both Lawrence (1998: 73-98) and Unwin

(1965) who argue that the distribution of party organisations is indicative of the strength of their electoral support. The strongest Liberal Associations were to be found in the towns and cities of industrial England and Scotland, in addition to being reliant upon the leadership of Nonconformist ministers across Wales. Contrastingly, Hanham (1978: 20) suggests that it was the lack of party organisation by the Tories in the counties that is indicative of the party's strength in these constituencies: 'In 1874 there were Conservative associations in only 44 of the 82 English county divisions; instead county electioneering was dominated by the local landowners and their estates, clergymen and large farmers'. However, this assertion has been challenged by Lynch (2000: 4-5) who argues that it would be wrong to assume that that Conservative elites dominated the county election process because, particularly after 1900, the number of rural working-class voters increased. These voters, she argues, were more numerous in the counties than in the boroughs and were more willing to challenge the authority of their social superiors.

County Constituencies

Following the enactment of the boundary changes contained in the reform legislation of 1884, 292 of the 569 seats in Britain were county divisions. Of these 234 were in England, with 39 and 19 in Scotland and Wales respectively.⁸ In these two countries there was, in general, a much clearer delineation

⁸ The Figure for England includes the three county divisions in Monmouthshire. These are sometimes attributed to Wales although its Welsh status is ambiguous until the 1960s. In this study Monmouthshire is always included in England.

between urban and rural areas, with relatively few county divisions containing Parliamentary boroughs; the situation in England was somewhat different. Pelling (1967) suggests that approximately 104 of the English county divisions were predominately rural in 1885 and that another 54 contained significant rural populations as well as urban or industrial ones (Lynch: 2000: 4n).⁹

County constituencies displayed a clear pattern of party support, as illustrated in Table 2.3. This shows that without exception electoral contests were two-party affairs between the Conservatives and the Liberals. On no occasion did the third parties combined achieve more than 6.7 per cent of the vote and it was not until the 1906 general election that they began to make any real showing in the counties. Instead, the Conservatives achieved a larger share of the vote than the Liberals at 5 of the 8 contests that followed the Third Reform Act, although the scale of these ranged from less than one per cent (in 1892 and December 1910) to just under 50 per cent, as at the contest of 1895. The margin of defeat in 1900 was only 2,493, or less than nine votes per division. Despite the relatively close nature of the popular vote between the two parties, however, this was never translated into anything less than a decisive Conservative victory in terms of seats. This was particularly the case in the

⁹ Blewett (1972: 488-94) provides a similar analysis of county constituencies for a later period, using population statistics drawn from the census of 1911. These vary little from those of Pelling and Lynch: he finds 98 rural, 51 semi-rural and 82 urbanised constituencies.

English counties – the 'chief strongholds' of the party (Hanham, 1978: 25) – where it regularly won twice as many seats as its opponents put together.¹⁰

Table 2.3 Party shares of the vote in county constituencies, 1885-December 1910

Election	Conservative share (%)	Liberal share (%)	Labour share (%)	'Other' parties share (%)
1885	45.1	52.6	1.3	1.0
1886	51.4	48.5	0.0	0.1
1892	49.8	49.0	1.0	0.2
1895	74.0	25.9	0.1	0.0
1900	49.6	49.7	0.2	0.5
1906	44.3	50.7	1.8	3.2
Jan 1910	47.4	46.0	6.2	0.4
Dec 1910	47.0	46.2	5.4	1.3

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Conservative strength in the counties lay in particular areas. The most overwhelmingly Tory area was the South East region of England where party candidates gained, on average, a majority of approximately 31 per cent over their opponents.¹¹ In other areas – East Anglia, the North West, South West and West Midlands – where the Conservatives dominated county constituencies

¹⁰ In 1874 the Conservatives won five times more seats than their opponents on a very similar share of the vote as in 1885 (Hanham, 1978: 25).

¹¹ The average margin of victory is calculated by obtaining the mean share of the vote for each party at the eight contests between 1885 and December 1910 inclusive.

their average margin of victory was around 10 per cent. Individual constituencies were not as irrepressibly Conservative as these figures suggest, however; small majorities were not unusual, particularly in counties such as Essex, Kent and Surrey where there was a sizeable urban element.

In contrast, the county divisions where the Liberals found their largest levels of support were located on the periphery of Britain, in Yorkshire and the North of England and in Scotland and Wales. Other than in Wales, however, where their average majority was 18.5 per cent, the Liberal party did not achieve such large margins of victory as the Conservatives, typically being limited to a share of the vote around five per cent ahead of their rivals. Hanham (1978: 25-9) argues that the poor performance of the Liberals in the counties was not so much the result of weakness as it was indicative of their defensiveness, although the division between the Whig and Radical arms of the party also contributed. At the general elections of 1868 and 1874 many of the Whig magnates – of whom there were fewer than in the Tories – expressed their antipathy for Gladstonian Liberalism by encouraging their tenants to vote against Liberal candidates, the consequences of which undermine the party's efforts in county constituencies at the next several elections.

Borough Constituencies

A total of 245 boroughs returned members to Parliament after the Third Reform Act.¹² These ranged in size from those with electorates numbering just under

¹² Of these 205 were in England, 30 in Scotland and 10 in Wales.

2,300 through to around 38,500.¹³ During the committee stages of the Reform Act there had been significant opposition to retaining the smallest Parliamentary boroughs since they were historically associated with endemic corruption, being 'in the pocket' or one or more individuals (Rossiter et al., 1999: 18-19). As Garrard (2002:22) contends, 'many of the boroughs were ... effectively species of property – to be bought, sold, and especially enjoyed, by proprietors able to determine who was nominated and, in the absence of contest, thereby elected'. The smallest boroughs, however, survived for exactly this reason: to give the landed interest an opportunity to secure additional representation (Hanham, 1978: 39), underlining the continuing importance of land and property to notions of representation despite the continuing moves towards reform.

The Conservatives achieved a majority share of the vote at all but one of the eight post reform contests (Table 2.4), though, as in the county constituencies, these victories were not always by large margins – just 1.1 per cent in 1892, for example. There was, however, a significant difference in borough constituencies because both the Labour and 'other' parties made much more significant showings, with the result that on many occasions the Conservative share of the vote was surpassed by that of the other three parties combined. The Labour party appeared on the electoral landscape in the boroughs earlier than in the counties, at the general election of 1906, and it was in this type of

¹³ The smallest borough electorate was in Bury St. Edmonds in Suffolk at the 1885 and 1886 general elections, the largest Newcastle Upon Tyne in Northumberland at the general elections of 1910 (all these elections were contested using the same electoral register). The largest and smallest borough electorates can be derived from Table B.1 in Appendix B.

constituency that its strength lay. It had been preceded by a variety of Lib-Lab and other socialist candidates, beginning in the period between the second and Third Reform Acts, who had also found the boroughs a more suitable type of constituency than the counties.¹⁴

Table 2.4 Party shares of the vote in borough constituencies, 1885-December 1910

Election	Conservative share (%)	Liberal share (%)	Labour share (%)	'Other' parties share (%)
1885	48.4	46.8	0.2	4.6
1886	50.2	48.2		1.7
1892	48.9	47.8		3.3
1895	51.4	42.6	2.1	3.9
1900	52.3	40.2	3.0	4.5
1906	42.0	42.3	9.6	6.1
Jan 1910	46.5	38.8	10.8	3.9
Dec 1910	47.9	39.9	9.2	2.9

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The geography of Conservative support in the boroughs mirrored that in the county divisions, with the party seeing its greatest successes in the Parliamentary boroughs of East Anglia, the North West, South East, South West and the West Midlands. This distribution of support was fairly stable throughout the period between 1885 to December 1910 inclusive, with almost no increase in the Tory vote in areas outside of these. This extent of support was, however, in itself relatively new because it was only following the Reform Act of 1867 that the Conservatives had made any inroads into the boroughs of

¹⁴ These are included here in the 'other' parties column of Table 2.4.

South East Lancashire, North West Kent and the Cities of London and Westminster (Hanham, 1978: 74).

The distribution of support for the Liberals was somewhat different. Although the largest average margins of victory were to be found in Wales (18.4 per cent), Scotland (11.4 per cent) and Yorkshire, the two areas where this would be expected, the Liberals also outperformed the Conservatives in the East and South Midlands. These were regions that were neither wholly urban nor rural, with large areas of agriculture intermingled with concentrations of industry. In the East Midlands coal and iron ore mining in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, together with textile and boot and shoe manufacturing in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, combined with a unusually high level of Nonconformity (in the context of England) in the form of 'old dissent' such as the Baptists and Methodism (Pelling, 1967: 204-28). A similar mix of agriculture and industry existed in the South Midland region, particularly in Northamptonshire, together with a concentration of Nonconformism in rural industrial areas; in both regions there was also a significant amount of rural industry (Pelling, 1967: 106-124).¹⁵ Pelling (1967: 227) suggests that the Liberals outperformed the Conservatives in these regions because of two particular factors: firstly, the strength of Nonconformity amongst middle and working-class voters, and secondly, the weakness of the Labour movement in the regions despite the existence of a what might be considered a suitable electorate. Later, Pelling argues, the Conservatives made few inroads into Liberal support because the industries

¹⁵ Although it should be noted that not all of the counties of the South Midlands region that is used in this study are included in Pelling's Central region since some are to be found in his East Anglia zone.

that dominated the region would benefit little from tariffs – a central plank of the Conservative agenda at the 1906 general election – while the lack of any large-scale urban industry to accentuate class differences hindered the development of the Labour party. Its vote was to be found located predominately in the North and North West regions of England, as well as in Wales.

In addition to location, the size of the electorate was a second important determinant of party support in the boroughs.¹⁶ Immediately after the First Reform Act Gash (1965: 134-5) contends that the smaller boroughs (those with an electorate of less than 1,000) were dominated by the Conservatives, whereas the larger towns and industrial boroughs were held by the Liberals.¹⁷ In the case of the latter, however, he draws a distinction between the wealthier, settled urban communities such as Westminster, Liverpool or Bristol because they were more likely to run counter to the general trend and return Conservative members, and the more suburban areas of London and the new industrial centres of Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, for example, in which the Tories could make few inroads. Hanham (1978: 39, 74) detects a similar division of electoral support in the boroughs for the period between the elections of 1868 and 1880. Between these contests the Conservatives continued to dominate constituencies with electorates of less than 10,000, while the Liberals controlled those with electorates of between 10-20,000. In towns

¹⁶ It is arguable that the size of the borough electorate was actually an indicator of other socio-economic factors.

¹⁷ Although it should be noted that the Figures employed by Gash are calculated from the results of the general election of 1841, the high point in Conservative strength between the first and Second Reform Acts.

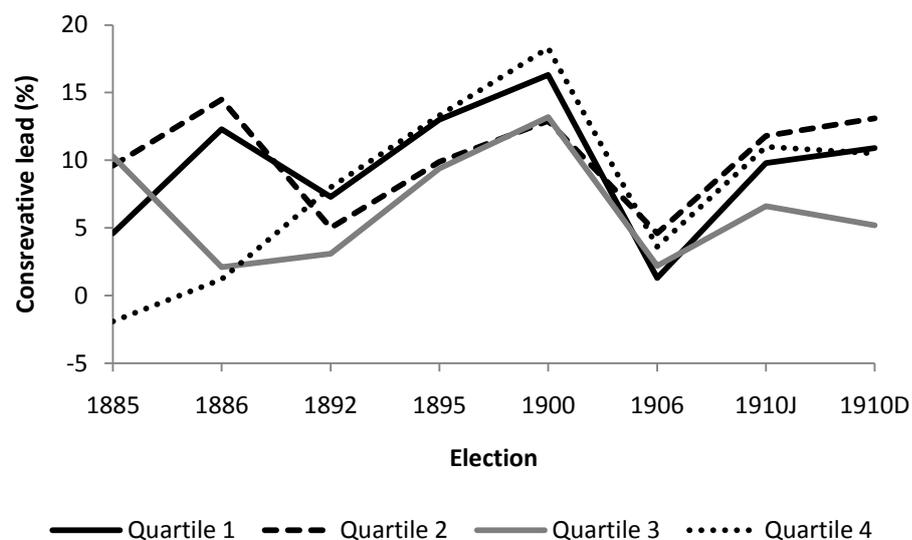
with a population of over 50,000 the Liberals typically won around two and half times as many seats as the Conservatives did (Hanham, 1978: 92). The reasons behind this pattern were identical to those of the earlier period, particularly so in the smaller boroughs which continued to be much more likely to fall victim to the influence of the major local landowner. In the larger boroughs the tendency to support Liberal candidates was determined by the employers of labour, while Conservatives were 'gravely handicapped ... by their association in the public mind with aristocratic exclusiveness, with the privileges of the Church of England, and with hostility to industry and free trade' (Hanham, 1978: 74). Finally, in the medium-sized boroughs, the combination of Liberal-leaning small shopkeepers and larger employers ensured the party continued to hold the upper hand.¹⁸

There is evidence to suggest that such a clear division of boroughs between the parties according to their size was coming to an end by the Third Reform Act. Hanham (1978: 39) shows that Conservative strength in the smallest constituencies had ended by 1880, while the Liberals experienced much greater opposition in their traditional strongholds after this date as well. The roots of the new competition lay in the 1874 election when many prominent Radicals withdrew their support for Liberal candidates in their constituencies, but without transferring it to the Conservatives. As a result of this the Tories met no effective opposition and won 23 seats that had previously been held by the Liberals. Although the alienated Liberals reinstated their allegiances by the election of 1880 – at which there were record victories for the Liberals in many

¹⁸ One notable exception to this rule were butchers who, studies have shown, almost always voted Conservative. See Nossiter (1975).

towns – the Conservatives had been transformed into more effective opponents (Hanham, 1978: 74). The events of the period between the second and Third Reform Acts continued to influence the distribution of party support in the eight contests that followed the legislation of 1884. A summary of these contests is given in Figure 2.5 which shows for each election how the Conservative 'lead', in some cases negative, over the Liberals varied in the boroughs. These have been grouped into four quartiles according to their electorate size, quartile 1 being the smallest.

Figure 2.5 Conservative lead in borough constituencies according to electorate size, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

From 1885 to 1906 the Conservatives were strongest in the two lowest quartiles, that is they achieved the largest margins of victory over the Liberals in the two groups of constituencies with the smaller electorates. In contrast, the Liberals managed to limit the Conservative showing in the larger borough

constituencies, although it was only in 1885 that they held any lead over the Tories. From the election of 1892 onwards both of these quartiles began to conform much more closely to the trends displayed by the other two groupings and, in fact, the largest boroughs – previously the among the most Liberal – became the constituencies in which Conservative strength was greatest. From 1900 onwards it is particularly noticeable how little deviation there was in the Conservative lead in the boroughs, regardless of the size of the electorate. The Liberals made significant inroads in to this at the general election of 1906, a situation that continued in the more medium-sized constituencies (quartile 3) at the two subsequent contests, albeit with the Labour movement making many of the gains. Overall, it is clear that the contests after 1885 marked the end of the division of party loyalties according to the size of the borough. Instead the evidence suggests that the Parliamentary boroughs became increasingly 'national' in their outlook.

University Seats

Alongside the borough and county franchises there existed a third, non-geographical type of seat – that of the university. The roots of this type of franchise lay in the ascension to the English throne of James I and the resultant adoption of the practice used in the Scottish Parliament of allowing the universities to elect members. Beginning in 1603 both Cambridge and Oxford University were given two seats in the House of Commons, and they were later joined by Trinity College Dublin following the Act of Union in 1800; therefore, up to the Second Reform Act the three universities returned six members to

Parliament. Following the Second Reform Act this figure increased to nine as the University of London was enfranchised with one member, along with the four ancient Scottish universities, with Glasgow and Aberdeen together electing one member and St. Andrews and Edinburgh collectively another.

Only graduates of the enfranchised universities were allowed to vote and, as a result, the electorates were almost entirely composed of professional people and were completely and uniquely free of any working-class element (Pelling, 1967: 418-8). Perhaps more significant, however, was the fact that almost all electors in university seats were plural voters, eligible to vote under both this and a second (county or borough) franchise. The result of this was that university seats underlined that, 'certain sorts of fitness [to possess the right to vote] still received additional reward by virtue of university votes. [...] Property and education were thereby rewarded with up to two votes (additional to that gained by simple residence). Effectively, it also rewarded manhood and Conservatism' (Garrard, 2002: 82).

This final point is a significant one since Conservatism and Unionism dominated university seats. Of the 56 individual returns after 1885, for example, 55 went to a Conservative or Unionist candidate. The sole exception was the return of a Liberal member for the University of London at the general election of 1885 ('as befitted a less exclusive electorate' (Pelling, 1967: 419)), although he switched allegiance by the contest of 1886 and stood as Unionist, with Unionists always elected in the constituency thereafter. This dominance went virtually unchallenged in England since its four (later five) university seats were frequently uncontested. Over the course of the 20 general elections between 1832 and December 1910 inclusive, the two seats of Cambridge University

were contested on only two occasions, in 1847 and 1906, while those of Oxford University were fought over just three times, although on two occasions all of the candidates were Conservatives. In contrast, contests were the norm in the Scottish set of seats, particularly before the Third Reform Act.

The partisan nature of the electorate in university seats ensured their existence until 1950 – 'the Conservatives could contemplate the university votes with agreeable anticipation' (Garrard, 2002: 69). The first moves to eradicate the seats were made during the committee stage of the Third Reform Act, although an amendment for the abolition of university seats obtained only 79 votes in its favour (Seymour, 1912: 510-11). After 1918, however, the number of university voters increased to around 60,000 (Garrard, 2002: 69) as three more seats were added, two for the Combined English Universities and one for the University of Wales.

Uncontested Constituencies

So far this chapter has analysed the results of contested elections alone. However, there were also a substantial number of constituencies that did not hold an actual poll but still sent members to Parliament. These are commonly referred to as 'uncontested' elections, although this is somewhat of a misnomer: firstly because many of the traditional campaign activities still occurred – the traditional chairing of the member, various demonstrations of support, the throwing of money into the crowd, for example (Cragoe, 1996: 170) – despite the absence of a poll and, secondly, because an uncontested seat frequently indicated the strength of political feeling and organisation in a constituency.

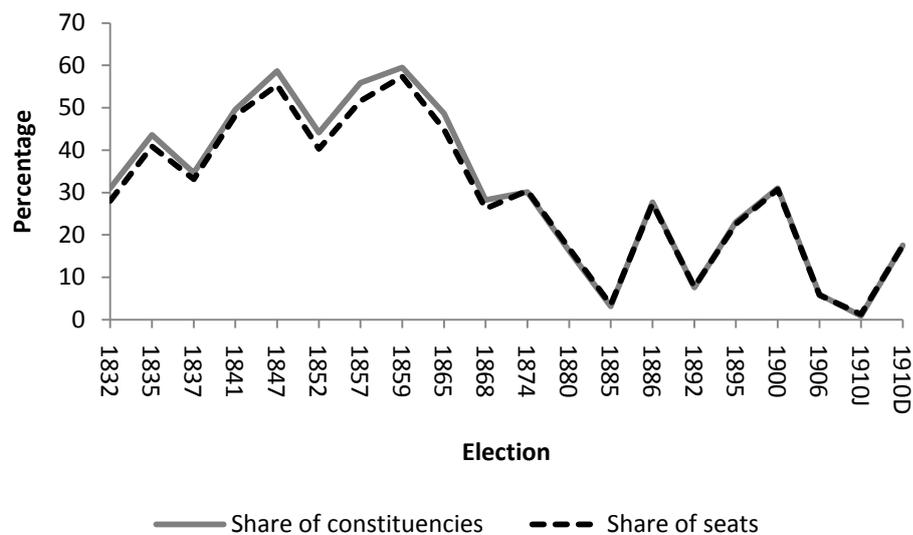
Consequently, studies of uncontested elections have typically focused on either individual (Fisher, 1976; Foster, 1977) or small groups (Moore, 1976) of contests to examine the operation and politicisation of the nineteenth-century political system, rather than on the broader impact of uncontested seats on the geography of party support (the sole exception is Lloyd, 1965).

During the pre-reform period it was the norm for individuals to be returned to Parliament without resorting to an actual election. This was particularly the case in the counties where there were only 28 county contests in the 16 years between 1774 and 1790 (17.5 per cent of all such constituencies), and 53 (26.5 per cent) in the period between 1818 and 1831 (O'Gorman, 1989: 108-9; Eastwood, 1997: 38), although it is important to bear in mind that there were more frequent general elections during this second period (five in 13 years). At the general elections of 1826, 1830 and 1831 there were contests in only a quarter of the 40 English counties (Moore, 1976: 22). Overall only 27 per cent of all English constituencies (borough, county and university) were contested on average at the five general elections held between 1812 and 1830 (Mitchell, 1967: 116).

The proportion of constituencies and seats that were uncontested between 1832 and December 1910 are shown in Figure 2.6. As a whole, the number of uncontested constituencies declined over this period, with considerable increases in the number and proportion of contested Parliamentary elections following the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884. The first general election after the 1832 Reform Act also saw a large number of contested seats although there was a substantial rise in the number of constituencies that were uncontested over the next three decades. Moore (1976: 282) notes that, 'obviously, the

relatively large numbers of contests in 1832 and 1868 were measures, in part, of the intensities of the political crises in the context of which the first two Reform Bills were passed'. Other peaks in the quantity of uncontested seats – such as in 1859 and, especially, 1886 and December 1910 – can be attributed to the fact that only a short time had passed since the previous election. As a result, many prospective candidates were unable to afford either to mount a campaign against the incumbent or felt that the matter of who should represent the constituency had been decisively settled at the previous contest.

Figure 2.6 Uncontested constituencies and seats in Britain as share of all constituencies and seats, 1832-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

However, although the number of uncontested constituencies fell overall, it was actually more complex than this. There were three distinct periods: the first between 1832 and 1865 when 47 per cent of constituencies were on average uncontested at general elections; a second running from 1868 to 1880 when

just under one-third of constituencies were uncontested; and a third, final period between the 1885 and December 1910 general elections when the number of uncontested constituencies fell further to 14.6 per cent, although there was considerable variation in the actual amount at each contest during this time.¹⁹ The fact that the Reform Acts provide the punctuation in the overall downward trend is no coincidence: Lloyd (1965: 262) argues that these put the party organisations under considerable pressure because of the increase in the number of voters and, more, importantly, the increase in the number of constituencies meant more local organisations were required.

There is no consensus over exactly why the number of uncontested constituencies declined significantly and continually from the 1850s onwards. Lloyd (1965: 265) contends that the fall can be attributed to the fact that over the course of the nineteenth century general elections increasingly became a plebiscite between the parties. This was a move that tended to stress the importance of the party over the individual candidate:

An eighteenth-century candidate would not have run in a constituency where he had no hope; he could only do himself no good, and he might do harm to his social position by pushing in where he was not wanted. By

¹⁹ Cox (1987: 69) examining the UK rather than Britain, as well as employing a slightly different set of periods, arrives at broadly similar figures. He calculates that between 1832 and 1865 nearly half of the seats were typically uncontested at general elections; at the three elections between 1868 to 1880 inclusive only a quarter were uncontested; between 1885 and 1910 only one-fifth were not contested.

1910 contesting a hopeless seat was accepted as a way for a politician to earn the gratitude of his party. (Lloyd, 1965: 265)

However, other explanations of the decline in uncontested contests have diverged in opinion. One interpretation stresses the decline of deference and the central role of election managers in detecting the underlying political sentiment of a constituency and, consequently, whether a poll was necessary (Moore, 1974; Moore, 1976; Cox, 1987). Initially, uncontested elections were the result of deference communities, created by political decisions made by leaders of 'definable groups and networks' and their shifting 'exigencies of cohesion' (Moore, 1974: 109-17). These were informed by the information about voters' political views and allegiances collected by election managers that was used to forecast the result of an election. If no change in the balance of power was perceived, then no contest would be held until one was. However, Moore (1976: 292-5) argues that their ability to accurately predict the outcomes of contests declined significantly in the run-up to the Second Reform Act, resulting in a growing incidence of contested elections as the opposing party saw an opportunity to challenge the status quo. This argument is supported by Cox (1987: 127), who asserts that, 'the increasing proportion of contested elections may have been due to the extension of the suffrage and the greater uncertainty about election outcomes that this produced'. Consequently, he claims, challengers were less likely to be deterred from attempting to mount a campaign against the incumbent: '... it was not uncommon for candidates to withdraw and avoid the expense of polling day if, after a few weeks of campaigning, they were convinced that their chances of securing a seat were

not good. ... Thus the candidate who expected to lose could cut his losses by withdrawing' (Cox, 1987: 127).

A second explanation emphasises the importance of election registration, party organisation and partisanship, rather than polling alone. Salmon (2002: 123) argues that,

After 1832 it was electoral registration that increasingly provided an alternative and authoritative basis upon which to chose either an electoral compromise or, as was more often the case, to force a complete withdrawal by one side altogether. It was in the annual registration courts that many elections were effectively being pre-determined. Registration politics not only offers a more plausible alternative to 'deference politics' for explaining the 'missing contests' of this period, but it also reveals much about the effects of local political struggles on the ground between elections

This argument is focused on borough constituencies where the First Reform Act limited the length of an election in each constituency to just two days.²⁰ As a result, the energy, excitement and entertainment of unreformed election campaigns now found its expression in the registration courts (Salmon, 2002: 38). This was amplified by the reduction in personal contact between candidates and electors as the result of the expansion of the electorate. In its place the registration courts became the means by which the party slate could be promoted (Cox, 1987: 128-9).

²⁰ The activities of the registration courts were just as critical in the counties as in the boroughs after 1832, although the legal limit on the length of the campaign did not apply in this constituency type. See Stewart (1989: 38).

The direct consequence of the politicisation of registration was a corresponding growth in partisanship in voting behaviour, and the decades after the First Reform Act saw a decline in vote splitting and an increase in 'plumping'. Vote splitting occurred in constituencies where electors held more than one vote and, rather than casting each one that they possessed for candidates of the same ticket, they instead split their votes across party lines. Cox (1987: 113) asserts that split voting was the result of four possible factors: competing influences, perhaps between a landlord and an employer; the appeal of individual candidates; party tactics; or real political inclinations. During the pre-reform era just over one-third of all voters cast non-partisan votes at general elections, but by the general election of December 1910 this had declined to just 5.8 per cent (Cox, 1987: 113). This decline occurred in stages, punctuated by the three Reform Acts; after the first act the non-partisan voting rate fell to 22.7 per cent, to 8.2 per cent after 1867 and below 5 per cent following the third act in 1884. In charting the rise of partisan voting behaviour in English boroughs for each election between 1832 and 1868, Nossiter (1975: 179) argues that there was class dimension to split voting: in general they, 'seem to have been more often cast by the professional and upper classes – one vote Whig, one vote Tory – than by retailers and craftsmen'.²¹ Party organisations, which

²¹ See Nossiter (1975: 178) for his figures on the extent of the split vote. Based on the evidence in the north, Nossiter suggests that boroughs enfranchised before 1832 and the smaller towns were the two types of constituency where vote splitting was the most common. In Nossiter's study the following counties were classified as northern: Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Westmorland, Yorkshire.

tended to be more numerous in the boroughs than in the counties, played a key role in sustaining the partisan enthusiasm needed for registration activity. These tended to be more numerous in the boroughs than in the counties because of the greater frequency of elections in the former.²²

The Geography of Uncontested Constituencies

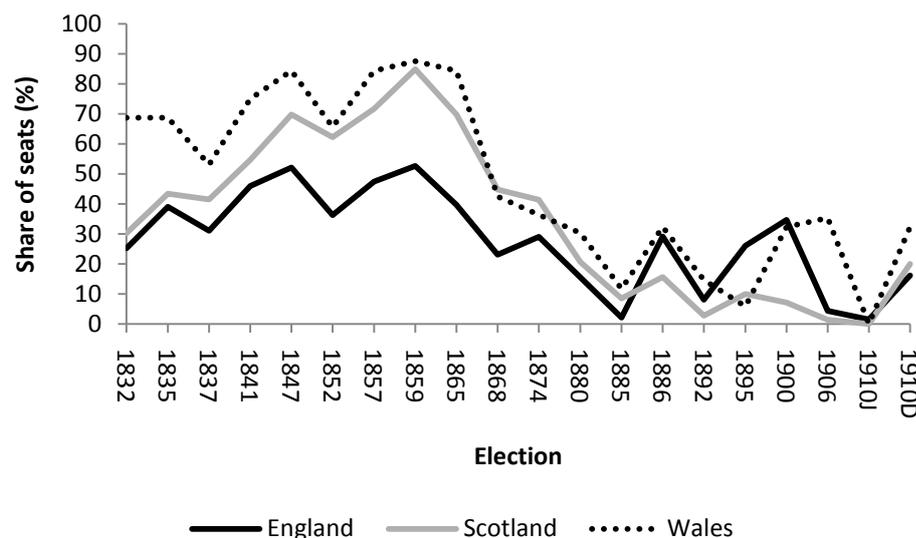
Uncontested constituencies could be found across Britain, although more so in England than in Scotland and Wales. There are two significant features that should be highlighted; firstly, approximately three-quarters or more of uncontested seats at each election between 1832 and December 1910 were to be found in England; more uncontested constituencies were to be found in Scotland than in Wales. Secondly, the Reform Acts resulted in the increasing concentration of uncontested seats in England – after 1885 75 per cent or more of them were to be found in the country.

A somewhat different picture emerges, however, if the focus is placed not on raw numbers but on the number of seats that were left uncontested as proportion of all seats; this is shown in Figure 2.7 for England, Scotland and Wales. It is clear that the provisions of the Second Reform Act had a significant impact on the likelihood of a constituency being contested. At elections before 1859 a much greater proportion of seats were uncontested in all three constituent nations of Britain, but in particular in Scotland and Wales. Here it was not uncommon for up to 85 per cent of seats to return members without a

²² Only in the towns were there local elections as the result of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, thus increasing the number of contests.

contest, compared to England where typically between one-third and half of all seats were uncontested. From the 1868 general election onwards there was a significant increase in the number of contested seats, with much more similar levels across all three nations. Although the peak in 1886 can be attributed to the short space of time since the previous general election, resulting in local agreements to maintain the status quo or a lack of resources to pursue a second campaign less than 11 months since the previous one, the increases in 1900 and 1906 coincide with the Conservative and Liberal landslides at the respective elections. Just as the concentration of uncontested seats in Scotland and Wales reflected the Liberal dominance in these areas up to 1867, so the increases in England in 1900 and Wales in 1906 mirror the electoral heartland of the dominant party at these elections.

Figure 2.7 Uncontested seats as a proportion of all seats in England, Scotland and Wales, 1832-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

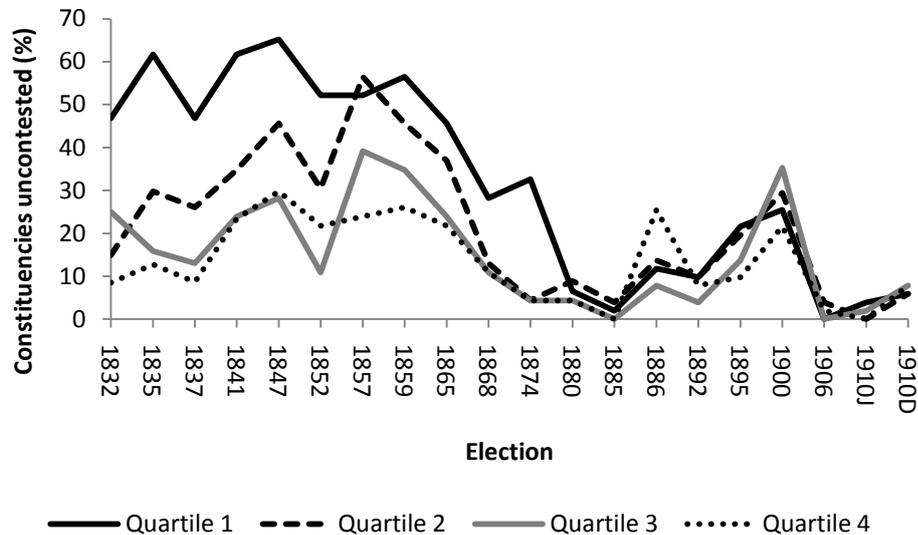
Cox (1987: 127-8) also focuses on the significance of the Second and Third Reform Acts in bringing about a reduction in the number of uncontested seats. He argues that although county seats generally remained uncontested because their geographical extent and electorate size meant that candidates faced greatly inflated election expenses, the number of borough seats that saw contests increased. This was primarily the result of a decline in the number of the very smallest boroughs, both because of a growth in the number of electors under the borough franchise and the disenfranchisement of the smallest, rotten boroughs that were controlled by patrons (see also O'Gorman, 1989, 173). The quantitative evidence supports this argument (see Table 2.5): between 1832 and 1865 there were as many uncontested seats in borough constituencies as there were in the county divisions; however, from 1868 onwards the number of uncontested seats in the boroughs progressively declined, with the result that by the general election of December 1910 only 22.2 per cent of uncontested seats were in the boroughs, compared to 71.7 per cent in the counties. There is also evidence to support the contention that there was a link between the size of borough electorates and the likelihood of a constituency being contested. Figure 2.8 shows the number of uncontested seats in the boroughs according to the size of their electorates, employing the quartiles described in Appendix B. Up until the 1880 election there was a clear relationship between electorate size and the number of uncontested seats, with over half of the smallest constituencies being uncontested, compared to under one-third of the largest. From 1885 onwards, however, this relationship breaks down so that there is no longer a correlation between the two variables.

Election	N. Uncontested seats	England		Scotland		Wales	
		N. Uncontested seats	% of all uncontested seats	N. Uncontested seats	% of all uncontested seats	N. Uncontested seats	% of all uncontested seats
1832	155	117	75.5	16	10.3	22	14.2
1835	226	181	80.1	23	10.2	22	9.7
1837	183	144	78.7	22	12.0	17	9.3
1841	266	213	80.1	29	10.9	24	9.0
1847	305	241	79.0	37	12.1	27	8.9
1852	221	167	75.6	33	14.9	21	9.5
1857	283	218	77.0	38	13.4	27	9.5
1859	315	242	76.8	45	14.3	28	8.9
1865	248	184	74.2	37	14.9	27	10.9
1868	145	105	72.4	26	17.9	14	9.7
1874	167	131	78.4	24	14.4	12	7.2
1880	92	70	76.1	12	13.0	10	10.9
1885	20	10	50.0	6	30.0	4	20.0
1886	155	133	85.8	11	7.1	11	7.1
1892	44	37	84.1	2	4.5	5	11.4
1895	128	119	93.0	7	5.5	2	1.6
1900	174	158	90.8	5	2.9	11	6.3
1906	33	20	60.6	1	3.0	12	36.4
Jan 1910	7	7	100.0	0		0	
Dec 1910	99	74	74.7	14	14.1	11	11.1

Table 2.5 Uncontested seats in England, Scotland and Wales, 1832-December 1910

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 2.8 Uncontested seats according to the size of borough electorates, 1832-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The Parties and Uncontested Seats

Based on these geographies it would seem that the two main parties gained different advantages through uncontested seats. Liberal strength in Scotland and Wales was reflected in the concentration of a large proportion of uncontested seats in these two regions, as was the Tory dominance in the counties and the smaller boroughs. This was reflected in the parties' shares of MPs returned from uncontested constituencies (Table 2.6). Prior to the Second Reform Act more uncontested seats returned Liberal members than Conservative, although this situation was reversed from 1868 onwards as the Tories cemented their control of English constituencies – the area in which the majority of uncontested constituencies were located.

Election	N. Uncontested Seats	Conservative MPs		Liberal MPs		Labour MPs		Other MPs	
		N. Returned in Uncontested Seats	Proportion share (%)	N. Returned in Uncontested Seats	Proportion share (%)	N. Returned in Uncontested Seats	Proportion share (%)	N. Returned in Uncontested Seats	Proportion share (%)
1832	155	50	32.3	105	67.7				
1835	226	101	44.7	125	55.3				
1837	183	102	55.7	81	44.3				
1841	266	183	68.8	83	31.2				
1847	305	179	58.7	126	41.3				
1852	221	143	64.7	78	35.3				
1857	283	134	47.3	149	52.7				
1859	315	157	49.8	158	50.2				
1865	248	116	46.8	132	53.2				
1868	145	64	44.1	81	55.9				
1874	167	114	68.3	53	31.7				
1880	92	52	56.5	39	42.4			1	1.1
1885	20	9	45.0	11	55.0				
1886	155	114	73.5	39	25.2			2	1.3
1892	44	29	65.9	13	29.5			2	4.5
1895	128	117	91.4	11	8.6				
1900	174	152	87.4	22	12.6				
1906	33	5	15.2	23	69.7	1	3.0	4	12.1
Jan 1910	7	7	100						
Dec 1910	99	61	61.6	32	32.3	3	3.0	3	3.0

bold denotes the party with the largest share of uncontested seats

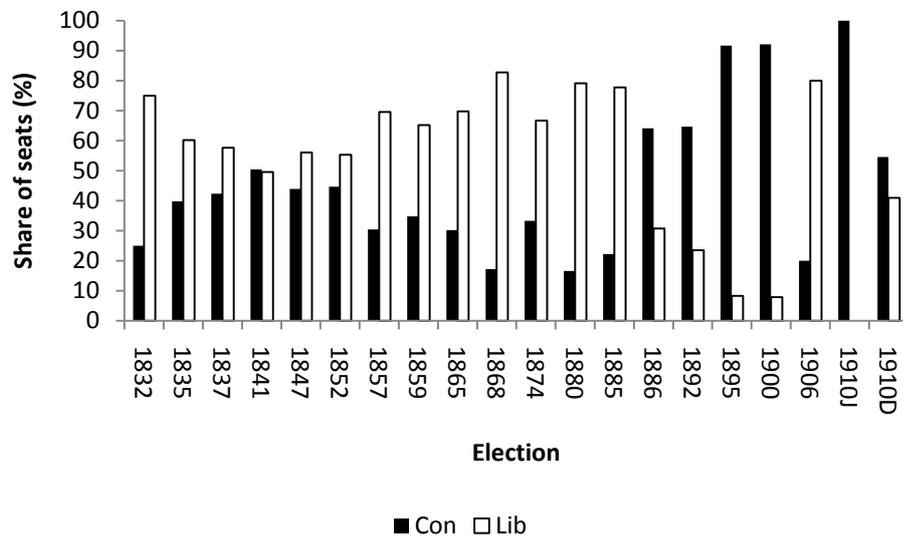
Table 2.6 Share of MPs returned from uncontested constituencies by party, 1832-December 1910

Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

This trend is confirmed by Figures 2.9 and 2.10 which show the shares of county and borough seats respectively that were won by the Conservatives and Liberals. In the counties the latter, with the exception of 1847, won the largest share of seats, but in 1886 there was a sudden reversal of this tendency and a Tory ascendancy was established. This built on the monopoly position the Conservatives already held in the boroughs where, with the exception of the 1885 and 1906 elections, their share of the uncontested seats was greater than the Liberals. Such Tory dominance was built on the fact that seats that were left uncontested at the polls rarely changed hands (Moore, 1976: 286-90), a reflection of the extent to which parties could take control of a constituency through efficient organisation of activities such as voter registration. The low number of uncontested seats changing hands between the parties without recourse to a poll should be compared to the number of contested seats that did change hands. Between 1852 and 1880, for example, 83 per cent of contested seats changed hands (Moore, 1976: 290).

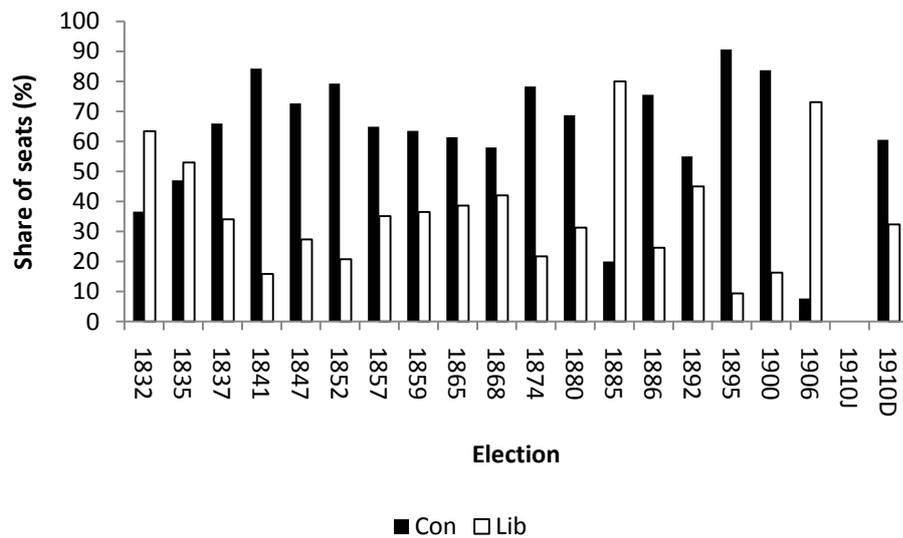
Finally, it is possible to examine the extent to which the Conservative and Liberal parties relied upon uncontested constituencies for their share of the seats in Parliament. Figures 2.11 and 2.12 show the proportion of all Conservatives and Liberal MPs respectively that were returned from uncontested constituencies, both in Britain and for each of its constituent countries. Prior to the Second Reform Act up to two-thirds of all Conservative members came from uncontested constituencies, although this subsequently declined to around one-third of all MPs after 1867. Generally, the proportion returned from English seats was in line with the national share, but during the period between 1832 and 1865, over 65 per cent of Welsh Conservative MPs

Figure 2.9 Conservative and Liberal shares of uncontested county seats



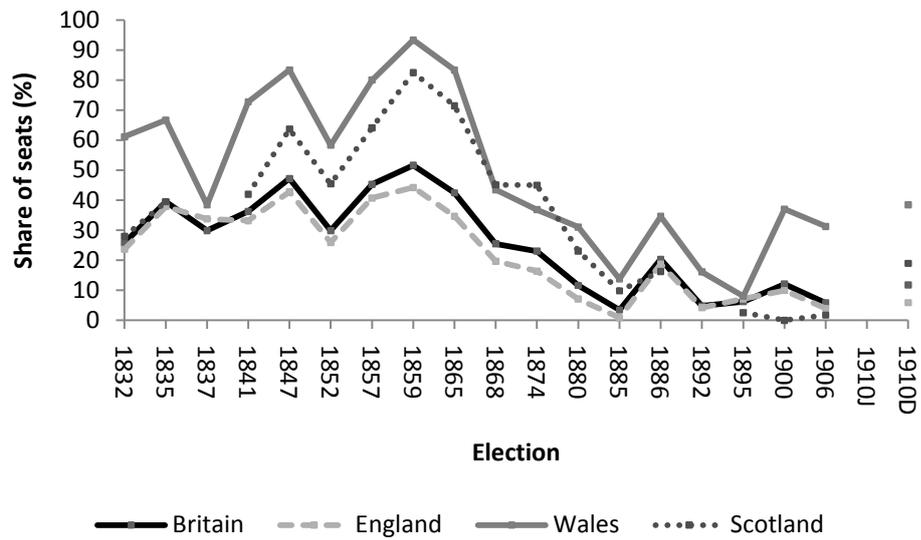
Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

Figure 2.10 Conservative and Liberal shares of uncontested borough seats



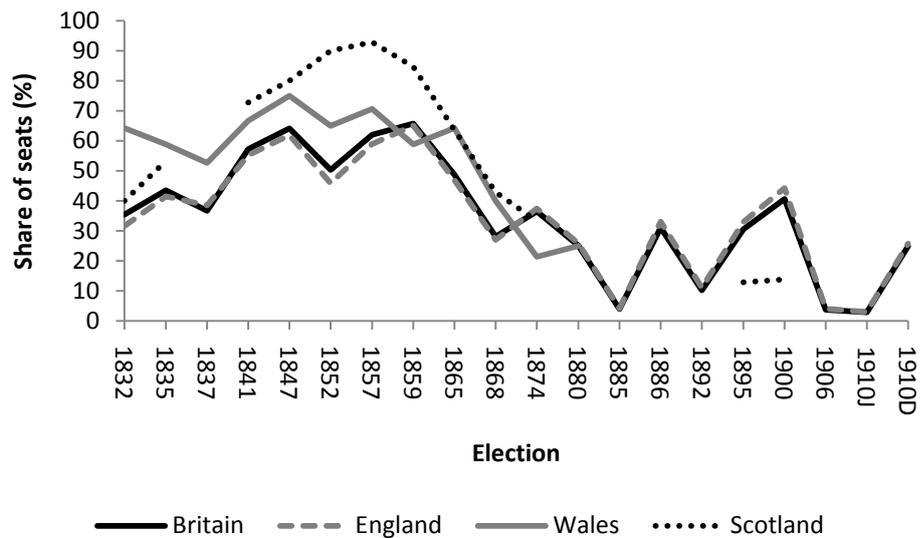
Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

Figure 2.11 Proportion of all Conservative MPs returned from uncontested seats



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

Figure 2.12 Proportion of all Liberal MPs returned from uncontested seats



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

and over 75 per cent of Scottish members were derived from uncontested constituencies. In Britain as a whole there were fewer Liberal members returned without a contest – no more than 50 per cent before 1867 and 20 per cent after, although, again, the strength of Liberal support in Scotland and Wales is borne out by the very high proportion of MPs from these heartlands being returned without a contest. For both parties it is clear that uncontested constituencies were a significant element in their shares of the seats available in Parliament, with large numbers of MPs.

Summary

This chapter has investigated the regional distributions of party support between the general elections of 1885 and December 1910. Over the eight elections during this period there was a clear evolution of a distinctive regional geography of voting in Britain. Although conventionally it has been assumed that the region played little role in politics until the postwar period, the later nineteenth century saw the development of a north-south divide within British politics. This saw the Liberal party in a sustained retreat to the edges of Britain, with their strongest levels of support in Scotland and Wales and the more peripheral areas of England, in particular the South West, North and Yorkshire. In contrast, the Conservative party, although always exceptionally strong in the South East of England as well as in industrial areas of the North West and the West Midlands, not only further developed its support in these areas but increased it in others in the wake of the Liberal retreat to the outer regions of Britain. The move towards

a greater regionalisation of electoral support is also borne out by the variable levels of swing between the regions.

Such general patterns of support were built on specific distributions within the different constituency types. Putting Scotland and Wales to one side, where the Liberals virtually monopolised representation in both the boroughs and the counties, the English county divisions became the chief strongholds of the Conservatives, although more so in some areas than others. The Liberals retained significant pockets of support in the Midlands specifically and in the larger boroughs more generally. This underlines the central role played by the size of borough constituencies in deciding their electoral orientation, although this was clearly in decline by the Third Reform Act. Therefore, borough constituencies saw much greater levels of competition between the main parties than either the counties or the university seats – as with the former, these were dominated by Conservative or Liberal candidates.

Alongside contested constituencies, uncontested elections were a significant feature of the electoral landscape. However, it has been argued that the term 'uncontested' is a misnomer – the fact that no poll was held was often a reflection of the strength of a specific party in a constituency. Although there were a much larger number of such seats before the Second Reform Act, the increase in the number of contested elections marked not so much an increased sense of competition between the parties as a reformulation of the relationship between the latter and the candidate. In general the distribution of uncontested seats mirrored the core-periphery pattern of electoral support derived from contested constituencies. In the Liberal heartlands of Scotland and Wales few election campaigns resulted in a poll; in England, its county and

university seats, the Conservative electoral strength also resulted in fewer contests at each general election. There were, therefore, clear overlaps in the regional geographies of contested and uncontested seats.

Chapter 3

Disproportionality and Bias

Introduction

Whereas previous chapters have looked at the geography of party support, this chapter instead examines the operation of the electoral system and how it translated votes into Parliamentary seats. In Britain the use of the plurality system (or first-past-the-post (fptp) as it is colloquially known) – first with multiple member constituencies and, from 1885 onwards, predominately with single-member constituencies – complicates the relationship between the geography of voting and the geography of electoral success; although winning votes has always been a key part of winning elections, the operation of the fptp system means that it is also essential to win them in the right places. Although the potential for disproportionality in the translation of votes into seats is not unusual in fptp system, the operation of the system during the nineteenth century in Britain has received almost no attention at all compared to the post-war period (see, for example, Dunleavy and Margetts, 1997; 2005; Rallings et al., 2000). Nineteenth-century elections were, however, at least as disproportional as those from 1950 onwards, if not more so. Other than at the election of 1892 where the Conservatives and Liberals were rewarded with a share of the seats that was within 1.8 percentage points of their vote share, it

was rare for anything close to proportional representation to be achieved.¹ In fact, at seven of the twenty general elections between the First Reform Act and World War One the party that obtained the largest share of the votes did not win the largest share of the seats in the House of Commons.

The disproportional outcomes produced by the fptp system manifested themselves in a number of different ways. Firstly, the process of translating votes into seats was inconsistent since the same share of the vote could result in substantially different shares of the seats. The Liberal party won 49.6 per cent of the votes cast in Britain at the 1892 general election – the largest share – and 272 of the 569 seats – 47.8 per cent of the total. Three contests later, in 1906, it won an identical percentage of the votes cast (49.6), but this time obtained 396 seats, 69.6 per cent of the total. This election is notable for the disparity in the allocation of seats between the two main parties in comparison to their vote shares. Although the Liberals only obtained 6.6 per cent more of the total number of votes cast compared to the Conservatives, they were rewarded with a share of the seats 44.8 percentage points greater. Secondly, the fptp system generally magnified the margin of victory for the winning party. Over eight successive general elections beginning with the contest of 1885, the share of the votes cast won by the largest party ranged from 47 to 51.8 per cent. The share of the seats won by the winning party was, however, spread much more widely, from 44.5 to 69.6 per cent.

Finally, the first-past-the-post system treated the Conservative and Liberal parties differently. At the general election of 1892, the Conservative party won

¹ Proportional representation refers here to a party winning a share of the seats in Parliament that is equal to the vote share they obtain.

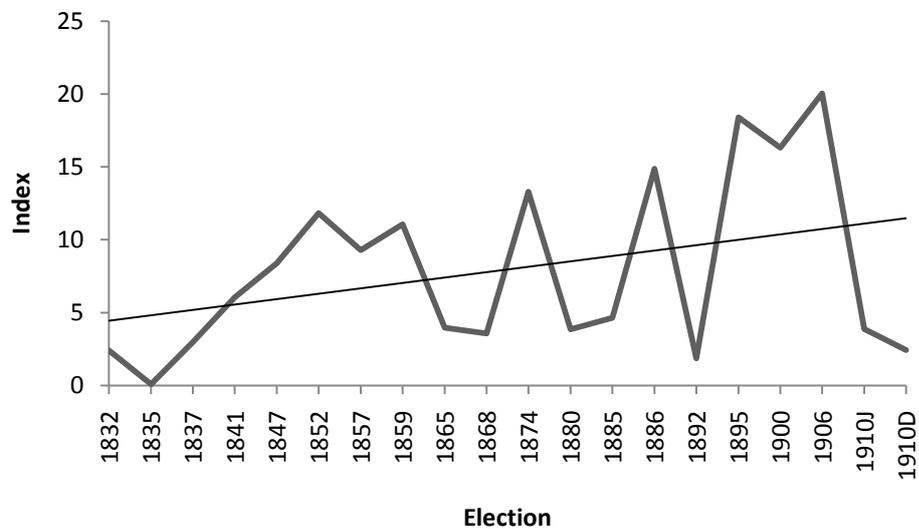
its second successive election victory since the Third Reform Act with 49.6 per cent of the total numbers of votes cast in Britain, a share just 0.1 percentage points less (49.5 per cent) than that of the Liberals at the same contest, but it won 292 (51.3 per cent) of the 569 seats. In addition to being disproportional, the electoral system was therefore also potentially biased in its operation.

This chapter examines the outcomes of the process of translating votes into seats for the eight general elections between 1885 and December 1910 inclusive, although, where possible, the entire period beginning in 1832 is included for greater comparison. Firstly, it examines whether disproportionality was the norm at British general elections during this period and the extent to which the parties were treated differently by the electoral system. Secondly, this chapter introduces a further measure – that of bias – that can be used to quantify the extent to which the parties were treated unequally, and outlines how the spatial variations in electoral support already outlined were accentuated by the operation of the electoral system.

Disproportionality

The results of British general elections became increasingly disproportional over the course of the nineteenth century. Figure 3.1 quantifies how representative election outcomes were by using a simple indicator of electoral system performance, the index of disproportionality. This is calculated by halving the sum of the absolute differences between each party's percentage of the votes and of the seats (Johnston et al., 2001b: 2-3), and can be understood as the fraction of all MPs who were not entitled to their seats in the legislature in terms

Figure 3.1 Index of disproportionality for general election results in Britain, 1832- December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

of their party's share of the national vote (Dunleavy and Norris, 1997a: 226)².

The index denotes the percentage share of the seats that would need to be redistributed across all of the competing parties so that vote and seat shares

were equalised, reflected as a score that varies between 0 (no

disproportionality) and 100 (total disproportionality). Therefore in 1832, for

example, just 2.4 per cent of the seats would have to be redistributed across the

parties in order to achieve proportional representation, compared to some 20

per cent in 1906. The general election of 1835 was the most proportional of any

² This measure is sometimes termed 'Deviation from Proportionality' – for

example, by Dunleavy and Margetts (1997) – and was originally elaborated by

Loosemore and Hanby (1971). A range of other measures of proportionality

have subsequently been developed. For an evaluation of these see Rallings et

al. (2000) and Taagepera and Grofman (2003).

of the 20 contests between 1832 and December 1910, with just 0.1 per cent of all MPs not entitled to their seats.

Although there was no difference in the level of disproportionality at the first and last elections of the period, as the best fit line shows there was a general trend towards greater disproportionality in the intervening period. It would be misleading to think of this as a continuous sequence, however, since this increase came about through two 'step-changes' focused around the Second and Third Reform Acts. From an average of 6.2 for the nine contests between 1832 and 1865 inclusive, disproportionality rose to an average of 10.3 for the eight between 1885 and 1910 (December). Some of the lowest amounts of disproportionality were to be found at the elections that were held either side of the enactment of reform legislation, that is 1865 and 1868 and 1880 and 1885. The average index score for the intervening period, between the Second and Third Reform Acts, is, however, deceptively low at only 3.6. With only three elections being held, and two of these making up one-half of each of the pairs around the Reform Acts, their low index scores mask the peak in 1874; the level of disproportionality at this election (an index score of 13.3) was the highest yet experienced at any contest since 1832.

The reason for the increase in the amount of disproportionality in the electoral system lies in the increasing competition between parties for the votes of the nineteenth-century electorate. Table 3.1 shows the percentages of the votes cast and seats won by the Conservatives and Liberals together in Britain between 1832 and December 1910. At the 12 general elections before the 1885 contest their joint share of the vote fell below 100 per cent on only four occasions – and even then it was no lower than 99.3 per cent – and the two

Table 3.1 Percentage of votes and seats in Britain won by Conservatives and Liberals combined, 1832-December 1910

Election	Votes	Seats	Election	Votes	Seats
1832	100	100	1874	100	100
1835	100	100	1880	100	100
1837	100	100	1885	97.4	97.0
1841	99.9	100	1886	99.8	99.8
1847	99.3	99.8	1892	99.1	99.1
1852	99.7	100	1895	98.5	99.8
1857	99.9	100	1900	97.5	99.3
1859	100	100	1906	92.6	94.4
1865	100	100	1910J	91.2	92.4
1868	100	100	1910D	92.2	92.3

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

parties won all contested seats, with the sole exception of the 1847 election. After 1885 however their hold over both the vote and seat shares began to decline because of increases in voter support for Labour and 'other' candidates. The broader range of candidates appealing to voters, and their electoral success at the cost of the Conservatives and Liberals, is reflected in the Effective Number of Parties (ENP) scores, which are shown in Figure 3.2.³ The ENP score is a reflection of how many parties are in competition with each other in an electoral system (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979; Dunleavy and Margetts, 1997: 228). Compared to earlier measures of party competition (Wildgen, 1971; Lane and Ersson, 1987: 154-79), the ENP measure produces an easily

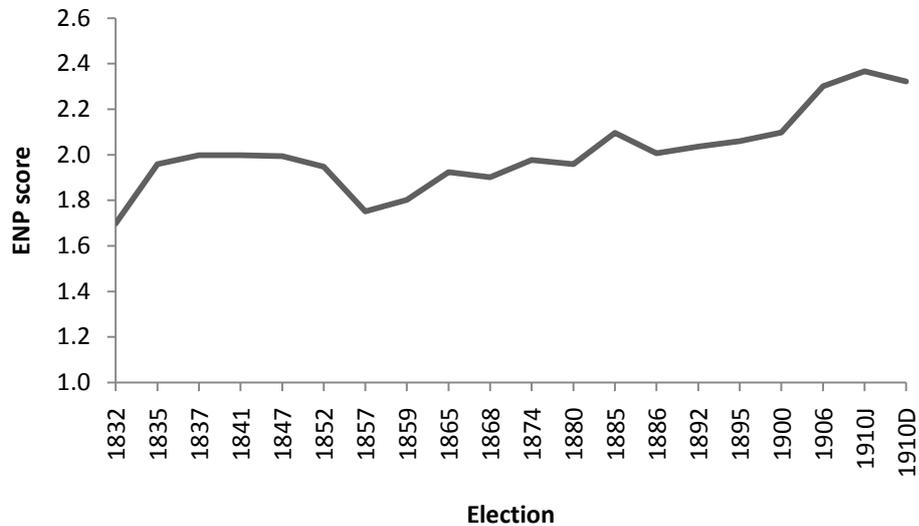
³ The Effective Number of Parties (ENP) measure represents the level of party factionalisation in a given political unit. The formula used to calculate the index can be found in Laakso and Taagepera (1979).

understandable index of the number of parties in competition that does not depend on the largest party's vote nor is distorted by the presence of very small parties (Dunleavy and Boucek, 2003: 292).⁴

In order to calculate the ENP measure for a particular election the vote shares of all parties are first expressed in the form of decimal fractions – thus a vote share of 51.1 per cent would be 0.511. Each party's vote share is then squared, converting them into even smaller fractions, but leaving the larger parties with a significantly larger fraction than those of the very small parties, which are almost zero. Finally, the squared vote shares for every party at the election are summed, and one divided by this total to produce the ENP score; in cases where all the parties are equal this will be identical to the number competing in the system, but where they are not equal in strength, the effective number will be lower than the actual number. Hence, in a two party system – as was effectively the case between 1832 and 1885 – with two equally strong parties, the effective number of parties would be exactly 2.0. However, if one party is stronger than the other, the effective number of parties will be less than 2.0 – the index indicating a move away from a pure two-party system in the direction of a one-party system (Lijphart, 1984: 120-1). As Figure 3.2 shows the ENP score gradually increased over the course of the nineteenth century, in line with the growth in the amount of disproportionality. Clearly the latter was fuelled by the entry into the electoral system of parties other than the Conservatives and Liberals, and the increased competition for votes that resulted.

⁴ Other measures of party competition are detailed in Wildgen (1971), Molinar (1991), Niemi and Hsieh (2002) and Taagepera (1999).

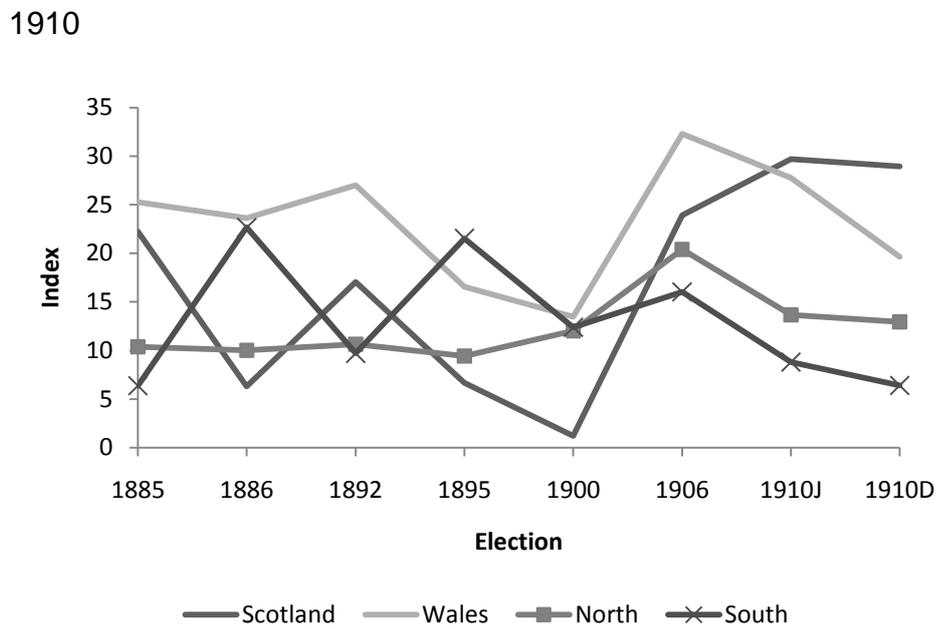
Figure 3.2 Effective Number of Parties (ENP) at general elections in Britain, 1832-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 3.3 shifts the focus of the index of disproportionality away from the national results to the three constituent nations of Britain for the period after 1885. This shows wide fluctuations in the level of disproportionality, although in general terms the election outcomes in England (divided here into 'north' and 'south' regions) were more proportional than those of either Scotland or Wales. The 1900 general election is a notable exception with broadly comparable levels of disproportionality in England and Wales, with around 12 to 13.5 per cent of seats needing to be redistributed, compared to only 1.2 per cent of the Scottish quota. Figure 3.4 shows the trend in the disproportionality measure in the two main constituency types, boroughs and counties, for the same period. With the exception of the 1885 and 1892 elections in the boroughs and the 1906 election in the counties, the level of disproportionality was lower in the

Figure 3.3 Index of disproportionality for general election results in Scotland, Wales and the 'north' and 'south' of England, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 3.4 Index of disproportionality for general election results in county and borough constituencies, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

latter group of seats, averaging 6.8 per cent compared to 10.5 per cent in the boroughs.

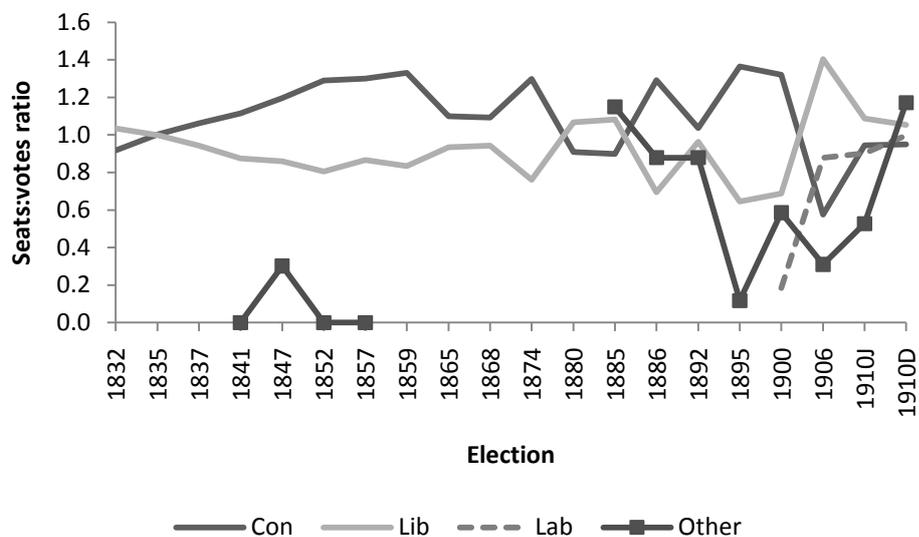
Seats:votes ratios

These measures of disproportionality do not, however, show which of the parties were dealt with more or less fairly by the British electoral system. Instead, it is necessary to examine the seats:votes ratios for each of the four party groupings over the period. The seats:votes ratio is calculated simply by dividing the vote share achieved by a party by its share of the vote. A ratio of 1.0 would indicate proportional representation, less than 1.0 under-representation and greater than 1.0 over-representation. Therefore, for example, the Liberals were over-represented by 40 per cent (a ratio of 1.40) in 1906, whereas the Conservatives were under-represented by 42 per cent (a ratio of 0.58).

Figure 3.5 shows the ratios for the four main groupings of candidates who regularly contested virtually all the constituencies in Britain – Conservative, Liberal, Labour and 'other' parties – over all 20 elections from 1832 to December 1910. The clearest feature is that over-representation was, with the exception of the 1832, 1880 and 1885 contests, the norm for the Conservatives up until the 1900 general election, with the Liberals correspondingly under-represented. The 1906 and 1910 elections saw this trend reverse as the Liberals obtained a larger share of the seats than of the votes at each of the three contests, despite not winning a majority of the votes cast at the January and December 1910 general elections. The most notable example of this was

the 1906 election when a 49.6 per cent share of the vote in Britain translated into a 69.6 per cent share of Parliamentary seats; the Conservatives were correspondingly under-represented, winning only 24.8 per cent of the seats with a 43 per cent share of the votes cast.

Figure 3.5 Seats:votes ratios for Conservatives, Liberals, Labour and 'other' parties at general elections in Britain, 1832-December 1910



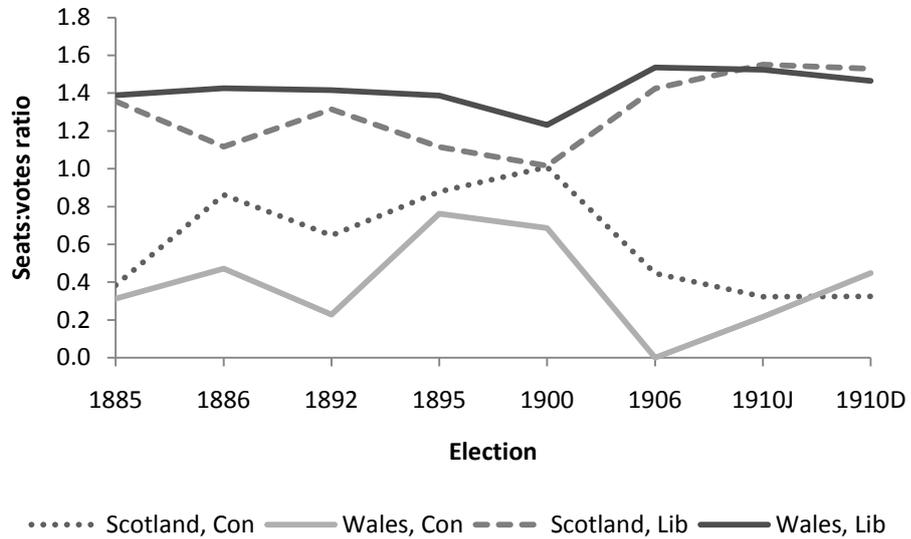
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

However, party groupings other than the Conservatives and Liberals were treated less well by the electoral system. The Labour party was substantially under-represented at the 1900 election (with a ratio of only 0.18) and required three further contests to move towards a position of proportional representation. In contrast the 'other' parties cycled from a position of over-representation in 1885 to a position of substantial under-representation by 1895, before recovering to a ratio of 1.17 at the December 1910 election.

The treatment of the two main parties by the electoral system varied across Britain. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 show the seats:votes ratios for the Conservatives and Liberals in Scotland and Wales and the north and south of England respectively for the period 1885-December 1910. The clearest feature is that the Liberals were always substantially over-represented everywhere across Britain other than in the south of England. In Scotland the seats:votes ratio for the party fell below 1.3 on only three occasions and was as high as 1.55 in January 1910. Similar levels of over-representation were obtained in Wales where the average seats:votes ratio for the eight elections of the period was 1.42 – this equates to the party winning 42 per cent more of the seats than it would have been entitled to under proportional representation. Similarly disproportional outcomes were also delivered by the electoral system in the north of England, with seats:votes ratios for the Liberals that were in excess of 1.1 at every election except one – that of 1895.

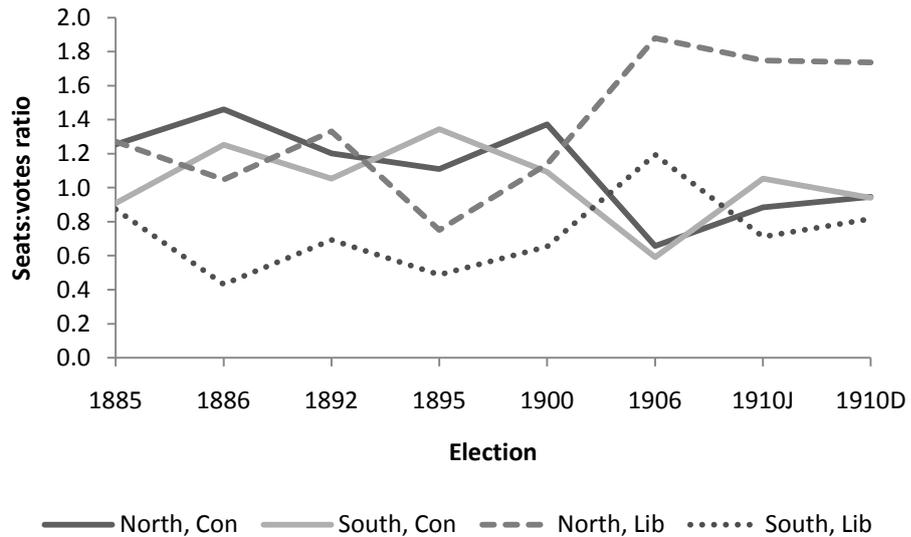
As would be expected, the Conservatives were under-represented in those areas where the Liberals had obtained a larger share of the seats than of the votes. This was particularly the case in Wales, with seats:votes ratios that climbed above 0.47 at only two elections (1895 and 1900), and in Scotland where, after having a ratio that was identical to that of the Liberals in 1900, the Conservatives became increasingly under-represented from the 1906 contest onwards. The pattern in England shows some similarities with that in Scotland, with the 1900 election also being a pivotal point in the party's seats:votes trend. In the north the electoral system rewarded the Conservatives better than the Liberals until 1906 (with the exception of 1892), with an average ratio of 1.28. At

Figure 3.6 Seats:votes ratio for Conservatives and Liberals in Scotland and Wales, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 3.7 Seats:votes ratio for Conservatives and Liberals in North and South of England, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

the final three elections of the period, however, this fell to 0.83, an under-representation of 17 per cent compared to a position of proportional representation. Compared to other areas of Britain the south of England was a region of relative stability for the Conservatives. Other than a transient dip in its ratio in 1906 (corresponding to a peak in that for the Liberals), its level of representation fluctuated around that of proportional representation.

Each of the disproportionality measures therefore provides a general picture of how the British electoral system translated votes into seats over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three key points can be drawn out. Firstly, election outcomes were disproportional on all occasions from the 1837 election onwards and were increasingly so over the period. The disproportionality favoured the Conservatives through to the 1900 general election when the Liberals began to obtain a larger percentage of the seats than of the votes cast. Finally, there were important geographical variations in disproportionality that influenced the extent to which parties could benefit from the operation of the electoral system. Although the Liberals were consistently better treated in Scotland and Wales, their increasing over-representation in the north of England was a significant contributory factor to them benefiting more than the Conservatives at the final three elections of the period.

Defining Bias

Collectively these measures of disproportionality suggest that the two main parties were treated unequally by the electoral system; initially the Conservatives were favoured but after 1900 it was the Liberals who were

treated better. They do, however, make two important assumptions: that proportional representation is the desired goal of the electoral system and that each of the parties are treated identically when they get a particular vote share – that is, that any unequal treatment is non-partisan in its impact (Johnston et al., 2001b: 8). However, in 1885, for example, the Liberals won 3.16 percentage points more of the votes cast than the Conservatives did. Clearly, like is not being compared to like and an alternative procedure is required to measure the extent that the electoral system produced results that are biased in their impact on different parties.

Using a method developed by Brookes (1959, 1960; see also Johnston, 1977) it is possible to explore the extent of the bias in election results, its direction and its sources in different situations – for example, when the parties obtained the same numbers of votes or if their shares are reversed. The Brookes approach is especially suited to the analysis of single-member constituency systems in which two political parties predominate (Rossiter et al., 1999, 137) and has been widely applied to the analysis of bias in a variety of different contexts.⁷

⁷ The approach has previously been applied to explore the nature and extent of bias at elections in New Zealand (Johnston, 1977; 1992); at all postwar contests in the United Kingdom (e.g. Johnston, 1976; Johnston et al., 1994; Rossiter et al., 1997; Johnston et al., 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000; Johnston et al., 2001b; Johnston, 2002; Johnston et al. 2002b; Johnston et al., 2006); and at elections in the United States (Johnston et al., 2001a, 2005, 2006a). It has also been used to examine the electoral consequences of bias at local government elections in England (Johnston et al., 2002a; Rallings et al., 2004; Thrasher et

The original algebra has been modified by Mortimore (1992) to express the bias as the difference in the number of seats won between the two parties, rather than as the number of seats that would need to change hands between the two parties to achieve equality. The full algebra for the decomposition of the measure into its contributory elements can be found in Johnston et al. (1999b) and Johnston et al. (2000), in addition to Johnston et al. (2001b).

The fundamental principle that the methodology operates on is that if two parties have the same percentage of votes then they should have the same percentage of seats as well. Should one party get a larger share of seats than the other then the system is biased in its favour. In order to measure the extent of the bias in the electoral system a uniform swing is applied, with votes shifted uniformly from one party to another across all constituencies.⁸ Table 3.2 illustrates this, using the 1885 general election as an example. The Conservative and Liberal parties obtained 46.6 and 49.8 per cent of the votes cast in Britain respectively, and won all but 10 of the seats. With equal vote shares each would have 48.2 per cent, so 1.6 percentage points of its votes won are taken from the Liberal's total in each constituency and re-allocated to the Conservatives. The result of this transfer of votes is far from equality in the

al., 2004) and the impact of redistricting in Northern Ireland (Rossiter et al., 1998).

⁸ There is an evident problem with this assumption since there were clear regional differences in both the extent and direction of swing between 1885 and December 1910. However, alternative approaches such as those developed by Blau (2001, 2004) to avoid this have produced results very similar to those obtained using the Brookes method.

allocation of seats: with equal shares of the votes the Conservatives would have won 31 seats more than the Liberals, a significant bias to the former. If the two main parties' respective vote shares were reversed (not shown in Table 3.2), so the Conservatives won 49.8 per cent and the Liberals 46.6 per cent, the extent of the bias towards the former increases further. The Conservatives would have won 290 seats and the Liberals 213, a majority of 77.

Table 3.2 Calculating bias at the 1885 general election

Party	Actual result			Equal shares result		
	Votes	Vote (%)	Seats	Votes	Vote (%)	Seats ⁹
Conservative	1,856,668	46.6	231	1,919,479	48.2	267
Liberal	1,982,289	49.8	301	1,919,479	48.2	236
Labour	23,691	0.6	4	23,691	0.6	4
Other	18,046	3	6	18,046	3	18

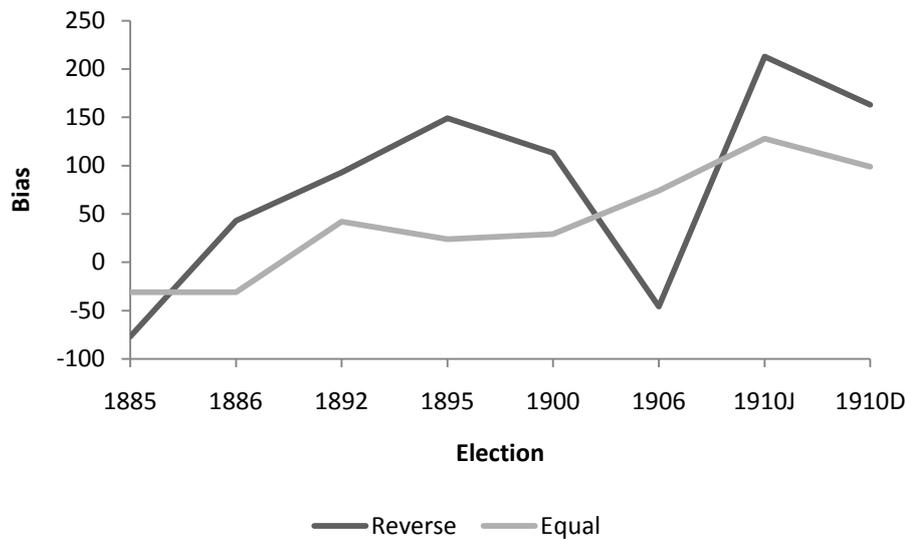
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Bias in Britain, 1885-1910 (December)

The bias measure has been applied to the eight general elections between 1885 and 1910 (December) to examine whether one of the two major party groupings – Conservative and Liberal – were consistently favoured over the other. Figure 3.8 shows the overall bias at each election during this period for two situations: if the Conservatives and Liberals had an equal share of their combined total of the votes (equal) and if their vote shares were inverted (reverse).¹¹ As in all of the following analyses, a bias in favour of the

¹¹ An analysis of the trends in the bias measure for these two scenarios for UK general elections 1950-97 is provided by Rossiter et al. (1999: 142-3). An

Figure 3.8 Total bias at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Conservatives is shown as a negative value whereas a pro-Liberal bias is a positive figure.

There were significant changes in the size and direction of bias following the implementation of the Third Reform Act. At the first two elections (1885 and 1886) there was a pro-Conservative bias, which stood at 31 seats in both instances. Over the next six contests, however, the bias increased, averaging 66 seats, with the Liberals benefiting on every occasion. At the beginning of the period, therefore, the electoral system favoured the Conservatives: they would have won 31 more seats than the Liberals would have done if the two parties had achieved an equal share of the votes cast. Beginning at the following election, however, the system began to favour the Liberals, to the extent of 42

outline of the pattern of bias when the two main parties have equal shares of the votes only for every election between 1950 and 2005 inclusive can be found in Johnston and Pattie (2006: 274-5) and Johnston et al. (2006: 38-9).

seats in 1892, 24 in 1895 and then 29 in 1900. The final three elections of the period saw a step change in the extent of the pro-Liberal bias, with substantial increases to 74, 128 and finally 99 seats respectively; this equates to an average bias in favour of the Liberals of 100 seats in the final three elections of the period compared to 66 at the previous three. The extent of the bias in January 1910 was the largest advantage for either party at any general election between 1885 and 1910 (December), and was equivalent to a seats:votes ratio of 1.42 for the Liberals compared to only 0.59 for the Conservatives.

Although this series is used for the remainder of this study, the trend in the bias measure when vote shares for the two main parties are inverted is also included to underline the extent to which the Liberals were the major beneficiaries of the process of translating votes into seats. There are two important differences from the equal shares situation. Firstly, the pro-Liberal bias was much greater across the period and came into being earlier. The electoral system favoured the Conservatives only for the first election in 1885 and, later, in 1906. Thereafter the results were substantially biased towards the Liberals, the bias peaking first at 135 seats in 1895 and then at 213 in January 1910. Secondly, the pro-Liberal bias was achieved despite the party trailing in terms of their share of the votes cast. On average the party trailed the Conservatives by 3.8 percentage points throughout the period, with the exception of the 1885 and 1906 elections where it recorded above average leads (6.2 and 6.6 percentage points respectively). It was at these contests, however, that there was a pro-Conservative bias of 77 and 46 seats; the former was an increase over the 31 seats with equal shares of the votes cast, and the

latter a substantial improvement over a Liberal advantage of 74 under this same scenario.

Consequently, even with the distribution of votes cast between the two major parties reversed, the electoral system still favoured the Liberals. It rewarded the party even when it was defeated – in essence a 'loser's bonus' – and only penalised it when it performed too well. Clearly, the extent of a victory was not necessarily the key to Liberal success but rather the geographical distribution of its votes across the constituencies. Therefore, not only did the outcomes of British general elections become more disproportional over the course of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth – particularly so between the contests of 1885 and 1910 (December) – but they also became more biased in favour of one party: the Liberals.

The Geography of Bias

The period 1885-December 1910 saw increasing geographical polarisation of support for the two main parties, focused on two particular elements: a north-south division in support for the parties and, to a lesser extent, an urban-rural division between borough and county constituencies.¹² In order to explore these divides further the total bias for each of these divides has been calculated for the period using an identical division of Britain into regions.

¹² A similar polarisation in the bias measure has been observed at post-World War Two general elections. See Rossiter et al. (1999: 149-54) and Johnston et al. (2001b: 205-7).

Table 3.3 Regional biases, 1885-December 1910 (with equal shares)¹³

	E	EM	N	NW	SE	SM	SW	WM	Y	S	W
1885	-4	12	11	-25	-75	-4	6	5	13	17	13
1886	-11	12	8	-14	-51	0	-16	-13	15	26	13
1892	0	15	19	-5	-48	6	-7	-19	18	39	24
1895	-2	6	14	-18	-39	-4	5	-8	17	34	19
1900	0	9	5	-10	-35	3	2	3	10	26	16
1906	2	9	4	14	-16	5	10	-9	11	35	9
1910J	3	17	18	19	-41	-2	13	-6	29	53	25
1910D	9	8	9	7	-20	4	1	1	24	43	13

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

These biases show a clear split of Britain into three regional groups (Table 3.3): one where the Liberals were always substantial beneficiaries, another where the Conservatives were, and a third where the biases were much smaller and more variable. The first, pro-Liberal group comprises five regions, including the four peripheral areas where electoral support for the Liberals was greatest: the North and Yorkshire regions, and Scotland and Wales, as well as the East

¹³ Table abbreviations: E – East; EM – East Midlands; N – North; NW – North West; SE – South East; SM – South Midlands; SW – South West; WM – West Midlands; Y – Yorkshire (East, North and West Ridings); S – Scotland; W – Wales. Again, a negative value indicates a bias that favoured the Conservatives and a positive one the Liberals.

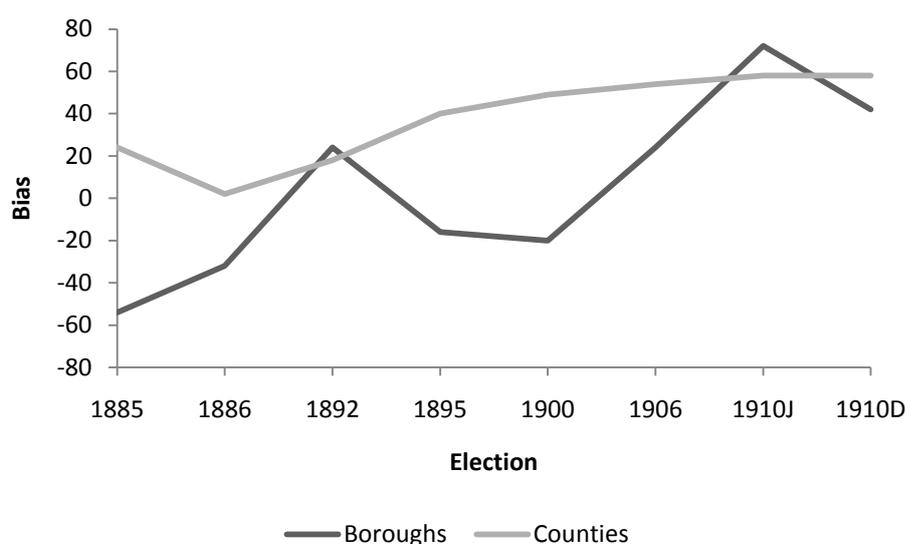
Midlands. On average these had pro-Liberal biases of 11, 17, 34, 17 and 11 seats respectively over the eight elections, a total of 90. The Liberal advantage was constant over the entire period, although it was above average at the 1892 and 1910 (January and December) general elections. In contrast, the second group comprises two regions – the North West and the South East – where the Conservatives were the substantial beneficiaries. In the case of the latter region, there was a pro-Conservative bias averaging 41 seats over the 25-year period, but this was less than half that enjoyed by the Liberals across the regions in their group. It was also an advantage that until the elections of 1910 was in decline, falling from 75 seats in 1885 to only 16 in 1906, corresponding with the erosion of the party's advantage in the North West after the 1900 election.

When combined these figures provide significant evidence of the role of geography in the operation of the electoral system in Britain. The Liberals were the party of the north and the Conservatives were concentrated in the North West and South East of England. Between these two core, partisan areas of seat winning was a third zone. This encompassed two peripheral regions, the East and South West, where an initial Conservative advantage was transformed into a pro-Liberal bias after the 1895 and 1900 elections respectively, and the South Midlands where the biases were smaller more variable.

There was also a significant urban-rural divide in electoral bias after 1885. The Third Reform Act required the Boundary Commission for England and Wales 1885 to separate the urban from the rural and produce compact divisions by ensuring that all suburbs were incorporated within borough boundaries, thus reinforcing the divide between town and country (Rossiter et al., 1999: 19). This

classification has been used to calculate the net bias separately for these urban (borough) and rural (county areas), the results of which are shown in Figure 3.9. The Liberals always benefited from the biases in the rural areas and, from 1906 onwards, in urban districts as well. The Liberal's advantage in county constituencies grew steadily after 1886, increasing to the extent that it was two-and-a-half times larger in December 1910 than it had been in 1885. With the exception of the 1892 general election, Parliamentary representation in rural Britain was biased towards the Conservatives until 1906, averaged around 20 seats over the five elections after 1885. From the 1906 election onwards, however, the advantage in urban areas switched to the Liberals, tripling from 24 seats in 1906 to 72 in January 1910 before falling back slightly to 42 seats in December 1910.

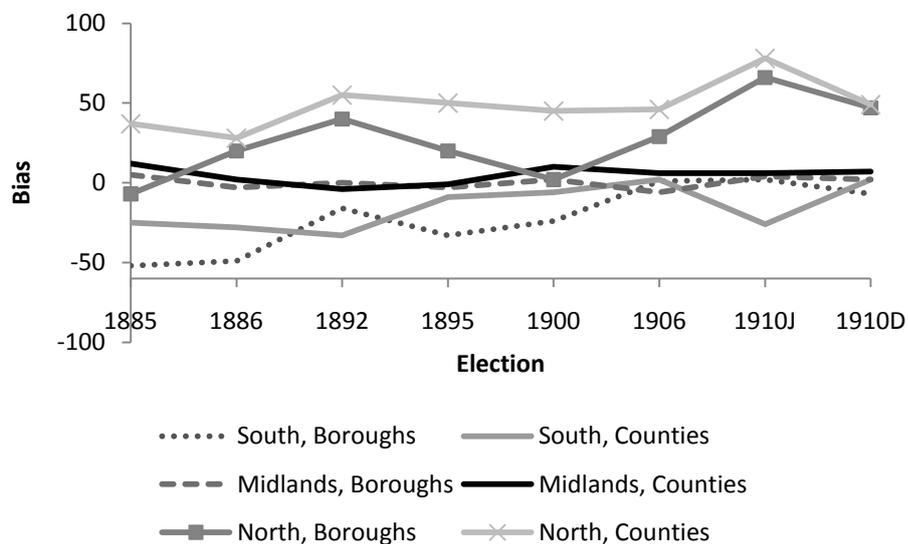
Figure 3.9 Electoral bias in county and borough constituencies, 1885-December 1910 (with equal vote shares)



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 3.10 and Table 3.4 bring together the north-south and county-borough divides, with the regions combined into three – South, Midlands and North – and each subdivided into its borough and county groups of constituencies. The 'north boroughs' and 'north counties' provided the Liberals with a bias advantage of between 47 and 144 seats at elections from 1886 forwards. In contrast, the Conservatives benefited from the two southern groupings, although this declined substantially over the course of the period from a combined total of 77 seats to only 5 in December 1910. The trends in the two Midlands groups were virtually parallel throughout the period, although their contribution to the total bias was negligible, providing an average of five seats for the Liberals.

Figure 3.10 The north-south divide and county-borough constituency divides in electoral biases, 1885-December 1910 (with equal vote shares)



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Table 3.4 North-south and county-borough 'divides' in total bias (with equal vote shares), 1885-December 1910¹⁵

	Britain		South		Midlands		North	
	B	C	B	C	B	C	B	C
1885	-54	24	-52	-25	5	12	-7	37
1886	-32	2	-49	-28	-3	2	20	28
1892	24	18	-16	-33	0	-4	40	55
1895	-16	40	-33	-9	-3	-1	20	50
1900	-20	49	-24	-6	2	10	2	45
1906	24	54	1	2	-6	6	29	46
1910J	72	58	2	-26	4	6	66	78
1910D	42	58	-7	2	2	7	47	49

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The main changes were in the 'south borough' and 'south county' constituencies where the decay of the Liberal advantage in the 'north borough' group in 1895 and, more significantly 1900, was counterbalanced by the erosion of the Conservative bias, first in the county constituencies of the south and then in the boroughs of the region as well. Throughout the period the county constituencies of the North generated a consistent Liberal advantage. The

¹⁵ Table abbreviations: 'South' – South East, East, South West, South Midlands; 'Midlands' – East Midlands, West Midlands; 'North' – North, North West, Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire. B – borough (urban) constituencies; C- county (rural) constituencies.

transition from an overall net bias that favoured the Conservatives in 1885 and 1886 was driven by an increase in the pro-Liberal bias in the 'north' borough group up to and including the 1892 general election. Combined with the decline of the Conservative bias in the county constituencies of the South, the resurgence of this advantage beginning in 1906 aided the consolidation of the pro-Liberal total bias after 1900.

Summary

This chapter has shown that the British electoral system produced disproportional results, favouring first the Conservatives, and after 1900, the Liberals. The extent of that disproportionality increased substantially between 1832 and December 1910, driven by an increasing amount of competition between the parties for votes. Geography also played a key role in disproportionality, with the Liberals being advantaged more than the Conservatives in Scotland, Wales and the north of England. The process through which votes were translated into seats was therefore unfair if proportional representation is the criterion by which fairness is assessed.

However, not only did the outcome of British elections become more disproportional over the period 1885-December 1910, but it also became more biased. With equal shares of the votes the Liberals would have benefited much more than the Conservatives from the operation of the electoral system after 1886, accumulating a significant advantage by the end of the period. This operation was also accentuated by the spatial variations in electoral support, with Scotland, Wales and the north of England biased towards the Liberals and

only the southeast towards the Conservatives. The next four chapters examine these changes in the direction of the bias and, as the next chapter illustrates, the key roles of the geography of vote-winning and the process of seat allocation.

Chapter 4

Creating the Geography of Bias: Constituency Definition and the Distribution of Party Support

Introduction

Bias clearly played an important role in nineteenth-century electoral outcomes; the previous chapter quantified the amount of disproportionality and bias in British general election results between the Third Reform Act and World War One. The second section of the thesis in turn examines this bias in more detail, considering both the general theory behind it and the specific causes of it in the nineteenth century – malapportionment, gerrymandering and reactive malapportionment.

In order to understand the complexities of bias and why it is so important to this study, this chapter uses the work of Johnston and Pattie (Johnston et al., 2001b, 2002; Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 266-303) to explain the main concepts of bias and how they can affect election results.¹ While their work focuses on contemporary (post-1950) elections, this thesis highlights the applicability of these concepts to earlier elections. It is necessary to outline these arguments in

¹ Johnston, Pattie and others are widely recognised as being the key proponents of electoral geography and the analysis of bias in electoral systems. Their work has been used by Parliamentary Inquiries as well as by other researchers investigating electoral bias.

detail so that their appropriateness for the study of bias in the nineteenth century is clear.

The amount of disproportionality and the size and direction of bias in general are both the result of the interaction of a number of factors – the geographies of support for both of the two main parties (Conservative and Liberal), for the third parties (in particular the nascent Labour party) and of abstentions – with the map of Parliamentary constituencies. How this is constructed, and how the support for the parties contesting an election is distributed across it, can have significant impact on the final outcome of an election. This chapter examines the role that the interaction of these two geographies – of votes and of constituencies – plays in the production of bias and begins to quantify their individual contributions to election outcomes in Britain between 1885 and December 1910.

The Construction of Constituencies

The first factor that plays a role in the creation of bias is the method used to construct constituencies. Constituencies can be built in many different ways but it is impossible to build a constituency system which does not lead to some degree of electoral bias. Constituency boundaries are not neutral and can favour one party over another. It is in constituency building where the significance of geography is clearest – in order to create any constituency spaces have to be manipulated with small areas amalgamated to become larger, more politically viable ones. For any area, county or borough, there is a finite but extremely large number of ways in which existing territorial divisions

can be rearranged into constituencies. Thus, constituency building cements the politicisation of space so that places and regions can be brought into the political system in an orderly but prescribed way.

Johnston et al. (2001b: 21-7) provide a series of examples to demonstrate how significant the political impact of the definition of constituencies can be when it is based on creating a set of constituencies from a larger set of smaller areas. Figure 4.1(a) shows four small areas, each containing 100 voters split between those who vote for party X (the top Figure) and those who support party Y (the bottom Figure). These areas have been used to create new constituencies, each of which must contain half of the voters – there are two configurations that meet these criteria, shown in Figures 4.1(b) and (c). In (b), neighbouring blocks have been grouped together on a north-south basis, with the result that each of the parties wins one constituency. However, whilst Party X has a seats:votes ratio of 1.09 (50 per cent of the seats and 46 per cent of the votes), this particular organisation of the constituencies penalises party Y because its ratio is 0.93 (50 per cent of the seats and 54 per cent of the votes). When, in Figure 4.1(c), an alternative, east-west grouping is employed, party Y wins both constituencies. It does this with a significantly more advantageous seats:votes ratio - 1.85, having won 54 per cent of the vote (216 of the 400 available votes) – than resulted from the north-south configuration; by contrast, party X has a ratio of 0. As Johnston et al. (2001b: 22) explain, there are three conclusions that can be drawn from this example. Firstly, if the only criterion is that the constituencies must contain equal numbers of electors it is possible to produce more than one set that meet this requirement. The second conclusion follows on from this: that without other criteria that need to be satisfied, it is

impossible to say which of the two configurations, (b) or (c), is better than the other. Finally, it is clear that whichever of the groupings is chosen there are significant political consequences for both of the two parties in terms of the number of representatives each gains and the efficiency of their vote-winning, as the seats:votes ratios indicate. This example therefore illustrates the crucial role played by geography – how constituencies are built is as important as where each party wins its votes.

Figure 4.1 Example of a constituency-definition problem

60 40	32 68
60 40	32 68

(a)

120 80	64 136
------------------	------------------

(b)

92 108
92 108

(c)

Source: Reproduced from Johnston et al. (2001b:22)

A more complex example of how a neutral system of drawing constituency boundaries can advantage one party over others is outlined in Figure 4.2 (Johnston et al., 2001b: 25; Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 280). This shows a territory which has been divided into 25 equal-sized wards, each of 100 voters, where they are contested by only two parties, X and Y. In every ward all voters turn out at the election, resulting in X winning 1,290 of the 2,500 votes cast (51.8 per cent) and Y 1,210 (48.4 per cent). The votes for the two parties in each of the wards is shown in Figure 4.2(a); once again, the votes for party X are the top number and those for party Y the bottom Figure. The sole criterion that must be adhered to when drawing up the constituency system is that the 25

wards have to be divided into five equal-sized constituencies (in terms of the number of electors) comprising contiguous blocks of territory.

Figures 4.2(b)-(f) show five different ways in which the new constituencies could be created.² As Johnston and Pattie (2006: 279-80) note, whichever grouping is chosen there will inevitably be some degree of disproportionality since party X has 51.6 per cent of the vote but can only win 0, 20, 40, 60, 80 or 100 per cent of the five constituencies. The simple north-south and east-west configurations depicted in Figures 4.2(b) and (c) respectively produce the smallest possible amount of disproportionality. In both X wins three constituencies and Y two, but X is over-represented with a seats:votes ratio of 1.16 (having won 60 per cent of the seats with 51.6 per cent of the votes) compared to 0.83 for Y (40 per cent of the seats with 48.4 per cent of the votes). If more compact sets of constituencies are drawn up, however, then party Y benefits more than X. In Figure 4.2(d), for example, party X wins only one seat while Y wins four – this is despite only gaining a minority of the votes cast; similarly, in Figures 4.2(e) and (f) party Y wins three seats to X's two even though it lost the popular vote. When, therefore, two exact criteria – that constituencies must have equal-sized electorates and be composed of adjacent blocks of territory – are supplemented by a third one that is not precisely

² There are a total of 4,006 different constituency configurations based on the grid of 25 wards shown in Figure 4.2(a). In 2,100 of these party Y would win three of the five seats, in 1,487 X would win three seats and Y two, and in 417 one of the parties would win four seats and its opponent one (Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 281).

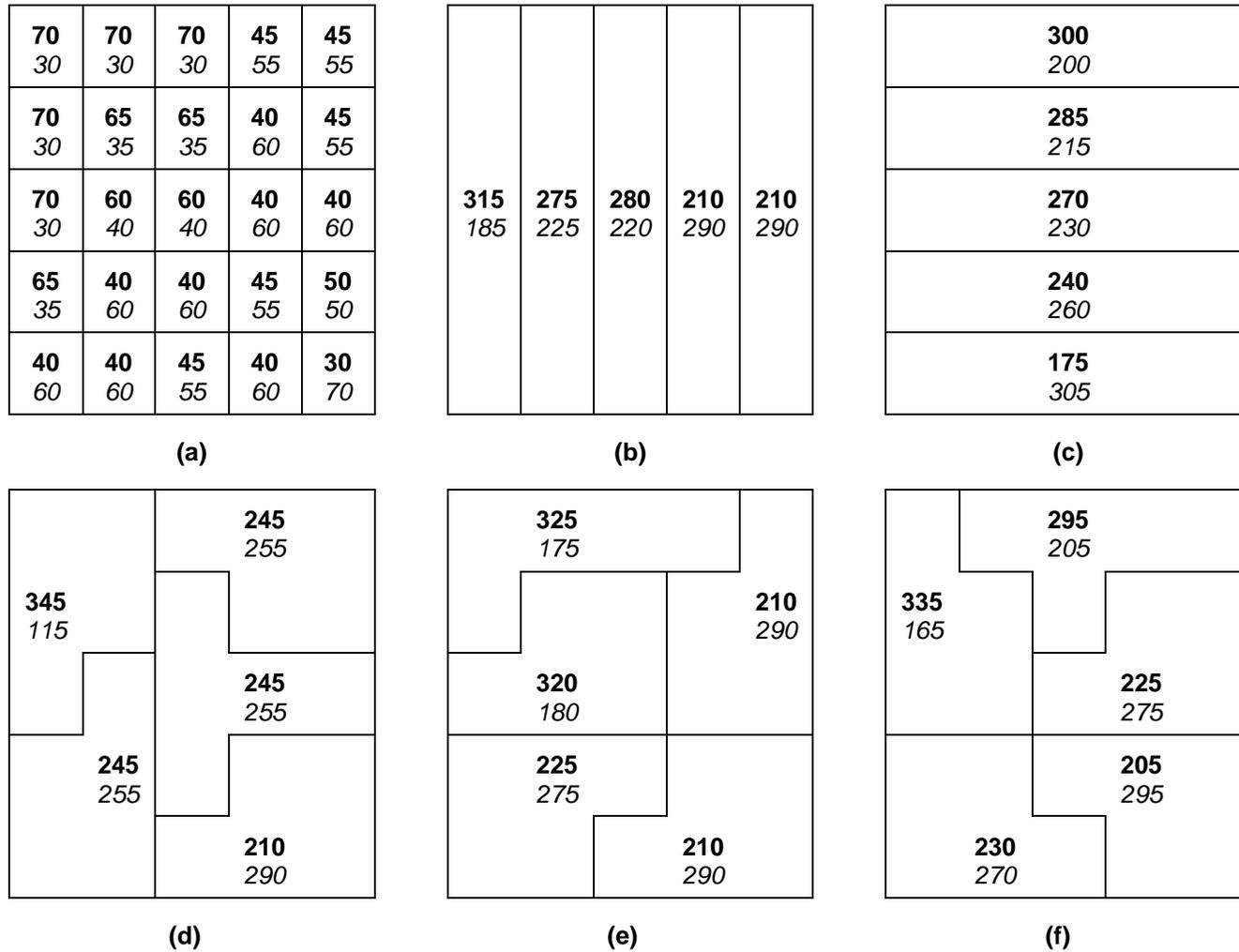


Figure 4.2 A larger scale constituency-definition problem (Source: Johnston et al., 2001: 25)

defined – in this case that each constituency must be compact – the outcome is far from proportional and favours the minority party (Y).

The Geography of Party Support

The reason why party X is the loser in terms of seats, despite being the winner in terms of votes, is because of the importance of a second geography – that of voting which is laid across the map of constituencies. Although X is the largest party, its strength is concentrated mainly in the northwest corner of Figure 4.2(a), where it has a majority of 40 votes over party Y in five wards and 30 in another three. Although Party Y also has an area where it is particularly strong – the southeast where it has a majority of 40 votes in one ward – in contrast to X, its support is more evenly distributed across the 25 wards; where Y wins its margin of victory is much smaller compared to X (18 and 33 votes respectively). Overall, therefore, party Y's votes are more efficiently distributed than those for X, with the result that in three of the five sets of constituencies (Figures 4.2(d)-(f)) the former receives a better return on its votes because of where they were cast and where the constituency boundaries were drawn (Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 281). Ideally every vote that a party wins should count in terms of it winning seats but under the first-past-the-post system, as this example demonstrates, this is not the case. Every party will have some ineffective votes on top of those that are effective in winning it seats: votes cast in seats it loses are wasted and those in excess of the number needed for victory are surplus. Hence, votes can be classified into three types (Johnston et al., 2001b: 13-16; Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 281-2):

- *Wasted votes* bring no return because they are cast in constituencies where the party's candidate loses.
- *Surplus votes* also have no impact on how many seats a party wins because they are cast in constituencies where the party's candidate wins, but by more votes than are required to beat the second-placed candidate.
- *Effective votes* are those which are needed to win in a constituency – the actual number is simply the number of votes cast for the second-placed candidate plus one.¹

The greater a party's ratio of wasted and surplus votes is to the number of effective votes it accumulates (plus those that are won by its opponent), the poorer its performance will be. This is because not enough of its votes will be translated into seats and therefore bring no return in terms of representation.

This can be illustrated using a constituency containing 100 voters. If party A wins 49 seats and party B wins 51, then all of A's votes are wasted while 50 of B's votes are effective because they are necessary for defeating A and the other is surplus. If the same outcome was replicated across 10 constituencies, every vote received by A would be wasted (490 in total), compared to 500 of B's that would be effective, with its 10 remaining being surplus. For party A such an

¹ As Johnston et al. (2001b: 19) point out the number of effective votes in a constituency can be smaller than half the number of votes cast plus one depending on the number of parties contesting the election and the distribution of votes between them. For example, in a constituency where 100 votes have been cast and there are three competing parties, the effective number of votes can range from 34 if two of the parties received 33 votes and 50 if the second-placed party wins 49 votes and the third party one vote.

outcome is a disaster – despite having achieved a 49 per cent share of the votes cast they are 100 per cent ineffective – whereas it is an excellent outcome for B because 98 per cent of its 510 votes (500 in all) are effective (Johnston et al., 2002b: 338). However ideal this situation is for party B, it is important to note that it can, at the same time, also be extremely precarious: only two voters in a constituency – or 20 in total – would need to change their allegiance to party A in order to reverse the situation and make it the outright winner. Parties can protect themselves against this occurrence in constituencies where they are the victor by winning a small majority of surplus votes, creating a buffer against the possibility of its support eroding at a subsequent election (Johnston et al., 2002b: 338).

This situation is unlikely to occur, though, because in the real world parties do not possess such a uniform distribution of their electoral support across the map of constituencies. Instead, the key determinant of a party's success in winning seats is how effectively its votes are distributed across the constituencies. Johnston et al. (2001b: 32-35) illustrate this through three simulated vote distributions for a party across a set of 2,000 constituencies, each of which is based on the assumption that the percentage share of votes that the party attains across all of the constituencies is normally distributed, and that each of the two main parties has an average of 50 per cent of the votes cast overall. They show that the size of the standard deviation of the vote distribution is crucial to the allocation of seats (Johnston et al., 2001b: 33): with a small standard deviation the party will win virtually all of the seats with a small majority, and approximately similar quantities of surplus and wasted votes. However, if the range between the minimum and maximum vote shares won by

the party widens, increasing the standard deviation, the smaller the number of seats that will change hands (and hence effective votes) and the greater the number of wasted and surplus votes. Clearly, the smaller the standard deviation in the distribution of a party's votes, the greater its advantage in the translation of votes into seats.

It is unlikely that the two main parties would achieve a share of exactly half of the total votes cast, however. In this case Gudgin and Taylor (1979: 69) show that if the mean is either less than or more than 50 percent of the vote then the best scenario for a party with regard to the distribution of its support across the constituencies is contingent on its mean vote (Johnston et al., 2001b: 36-8). As they demonstrate, a larger standard deviation will produce a greater change in the allocation of seats than a small one depending on the mean vote of a party; with a small standard deviation – a peaked, leptokurtic distribution – the party wins fewer seats (those where its vote share is greater than 50 per cent) than it does with a larger standard deviation. The opposite occurs if the mean well above 50 per cent – in this case the party wins a large proportion of the seats, particularly with a larger standard deviation. The closer the mean is to 50, so the size of the standard deviation has a much reduced impact on the number of seats that the party wins, instead influencing the number of seats that it gains as its vote share increases. It is therefore clear that 'disproportionality [...] is a function of the spread of values around the mean when it is close to 50' (Johnston et al., 2002b: 338), with the two parties affected equally because the frequency distribution is normal.

If the distribution is not normal, however, then bias is produced as well as disproportionality (Gudgin and Taylor, 1979: 69-70). Most distributions of vote

percentages for a party are not normal but rather skewed in one direction. A positive skew occurs when the right 'tail' of the distribution is more elongated than the left, whereas a negative skew is the opposite, with the left 'tail' more elongated than the right. The impact of a skewed frequency is greatest when the party's vote share is relatively close to 50 per cent of the total, assuming that there are only two parties (Johnston et al., 2001b: 38). In further examples, Gudgin and Taylor (1979: 69) show that a party will win a smaller share of the seats than the votes if its votes are overly concentrated in the small number of constituencies where it performs very well. Contrastingly, a negative skew, where the peak of the distribution is to the right of the party's average of 50 per cent, results in it winning a larger share of the seats than of the votes, and it losing those seats it does not win badly. Where the mean share of the votes is greater than 50 per cent, a negative skew in the distribution will result in the party winning slightly fewer seats than it would have with a normal distribution, as is also the case where the party's mean is below 50 per cent with a positive skew. Bias is therefore a product of the skewness of a party's geography of support across the constituencies.

Therefore, winning the largest share of the votes cast is not enough to guarantee a party victory – where they are won is more important; as Johnston and Pattie (2006: 283) assert, 'the efficiency of a party's vote distribution (its geography) is a key to its success or failure in the translation of votes into seats'. The party with the fewest surplus votes in its safe seats and wasted votes in those that it loses gains the most when votes are translated into seats. Furthermore, as Johnston and Pattie (2006: 283) assert, 'large and small parties

both benefit from their support being concentrated spatially; medium-sized parties get a greater advantage from a more even distribution of support'.

Partisan Constituency Definition

Each of the examples above has assumed that neutral criteria are employed when the map of constituencies is drawn up. There are, however, other partisan factors that can influence how efficiently each party's vote is distributed.

Because different solutions to the same problem can produce different election results (as shown in Figure 4.1, for example), then political parties and their associated interest groups will want to further their own electoral interests by influencing the choice of constituencies. Johnston et al. (2001b: 41-2) argue that they will attempt to do this in one of two different ways: either by attempting to influencing the criteria used to define constituencies so as to ensure that their interests are likely to prevail over those of their opponents or – and in some cases as well as – by seeking to be directly involved in the process of constituency definition. Whenever parties have attempted either of these, two particular strategies of cartographic abuse have been adopted: malapportionment and gerrymandering.

Malapportionment involves the creation of differently sized constituencies either deliberately or by not redrawing constituency boundaries after a period of population change that has resulted in some constituencies becoming smaller than others. These are arranged so that one party is strongest in the constituencies with smaller electorates and the other in those where the electorates are larger. This results in the former party receiving a better return

for its votes because the effective number required for victory is much smaller than for the latter, which receives a poorer return.

Figure 4.3 provides an example of how a block of wards can be deliberately manipulated to favour one party over the other. It is based on the same 25 wards as in Figure 4.2(a) where X is the larger of the two parties but its support is concentrated in the northwest corner of the map. As in each of the other examples in Figure 4.2 five constituencies have been drawn up, all composed of contiguous blocks of territory; the requirement that they be of an equal size in terms of the number of electors they each contain has, however, been relaxed. In the absence of this criterion the map of constituencies has been manipulated so that it is composed of one large constituency with 900 voters and four smaller ones (one with 600, two with 400 and one with 200). These are located in the areas where party Y has most of its support concentrated, with the result that X wins only one of the five seats and Y, despite winning only a minority of the votes cast, has 80 per cent of the seats, with each won with a relatively large majority. Party X also wins its single seat by a large majority, but it would require a 6.5 per cent swing away from Y for it to win either of the two seats it lost by 175 votes to 225, and an even larger one for it to achieve victory in the other two (Johnston et al., 2001b: 42).

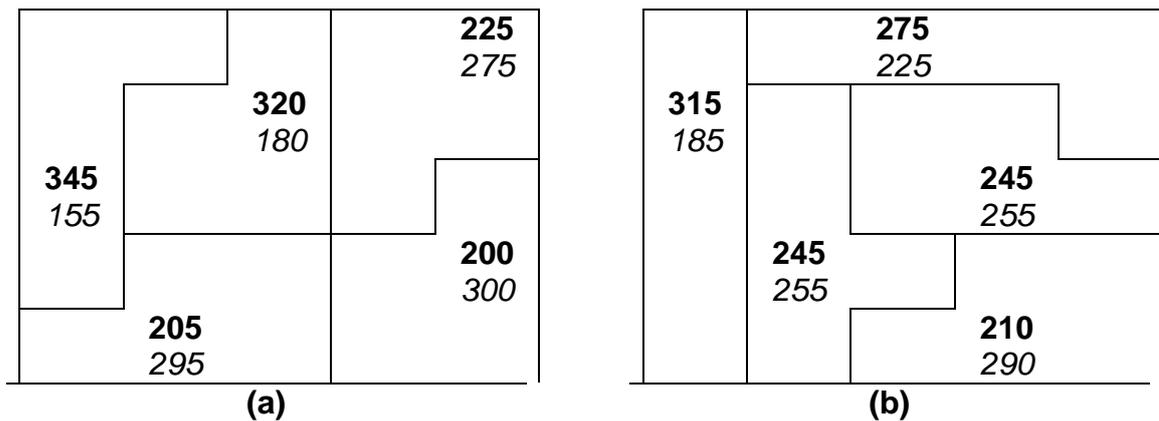
Gerrymandering is the act of deliberately manipulating the boundaries of constituencies to influence the outcome of elections by ensuring that as many as possible have a majority of votes for a particular party. There are two main forms of gerrymandering: creating a *stacked (or packed) gerrymander* involves placing as many opposition voters as possible into a small number of safe seats to reduce their influence in others, whereas a *cracked gerrymander* involves

Figure 4.3 An example of malapportionment in constituency definition

600 300	175 225
	175 225
270 330	70 130

Source: Reproduced from Johnston et al. (2001b: 42)

Figure 4.4 Two examples of gerrymandered constituencies



Source: Reproduced from Johnston et al. (2001b: 43)

spreading out voters for an opposition party across a large number of seats in order to reduce its representation by denying it a sufficiently large voting bloc in any particular constituency. Gerrymandering is effective because of the wasted vote effect – by packing opposition voters into seats they will already win (increasing excess votes for winners) and by ‘cracking’ the remainder among districts where they are moved into the minority (increasing votes for eventual losers), the number of wasted votes among the opposition can be maximised. Similarly, with supporters now holding narrow margins in unpacked constituencies, the number of wasted votes among supporters is minimised.

Both types of gerrymander strategy are depicted in Figure 4.4, using the template of wards from Figure 4.2. In Figure 4.4(a) party Y benefits from a stacked gerrymander because although the five constituencies are of an equal size the votes for party X are packed into two constituencies in the northwest quadrant; it wins these with very large majorities. Party Y wins the other three seats but by smaller majorities and despite having a minority of the votes cast. As Johnston et al. (2002b: 340) outline, party X has an average of 164 surplus votes in the seats it wins and 210 wasted votes in those it loses. In contrast, Y has an average of 167.5 wasted votes per seat lost and only 79 surplus votes per seat won. Consequently, the stacking of votes for party X in two very safe seats means that only 26 per cent of its votes are effective compared to 52 per cent for Y. Figure 4.4(b) shows how party Y could implement a cracked gerrymander. Once again X wins two seats and Y three but from a different composition of the vote totals but the difference lies in the number of votes each party wastes in the seats it loses: party Y wastes an average of 205 seats for each constituency it fails to win but X wastes an average of 233.3. Overall, 32

per cent of X's votes are effective compared to 58 per cent of Y's (Johnston et al., 2002b: 340). The cracked gerrymander therefore brings party Y a greater advantage than the packed gerrymander but at a greater risk. In two of the constituencies its majorities are greatly reduced and it would require only six of the voters in the two constituencies with a majority of ten to shift their allegiance to party X for it to win a majority of the seats (Johnston et al., 2001b: 43).

The Impact of Third Parties and Abstentions

So far each of the examples above has been based on two key assumptions – first that there are only two parties competing and, second, that all voters turnout and cast their vote. But bias can also be produced by a variant of malapportionment termed reactive malapportionment if either or both of these assumptions are incorrect and, in the period after the Third Reform Act, both were. Table 4.1 shows that 'third parties' (any candidate representing a party other than the Conservatives or the Liberals) contested seats at every election from 1885 onwards, though as a share of all constituencies this fluctuated, ranging between 4.4 per cent in both 1886 and 1900 and 12.5 per cent in 1906 and January 1910. Although third party candidates won only a meagre percentage of the vote, and an even smaller share of the seats in the House of Commons, until the 1906 general election onwards, they could still influence the result of individual constituency contests by decreasing the number of votes available for the two main parties.

Johnston et al. (2001b: 44-6) suggest third parties can impact on the votes of the main parties in four ways, depending on the geographical distribution of

Table 4.1 Constituencies contested and vote shares won by 'third party' candidates at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910

Election	Constituencies contested	Share of all seats contested (%)	Share of vote (%)	Share of seats (%)
1885	60	11.1	3.6	1.9
1886	24	4.4	1.0	1.1
1892	41	7.6	2.5	1.5
1895	47	8.7	4.6	1.7
1900	24	4.4	4.4	0.9
1906	68	12.5	10.7	8.9
1910 (January)	68	12.5	10.5	7.4
1910 (December)	37	8.8	9.9	8.1

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

their votes across the map of constituencies, each based on the same set of 25 wards as in Figure 4.2. Each individual constituency contains 100 voters, divided between those who vote for one of the two main parties, X or Y (the top and middle figures), and a third party, Z (the bottom figure), which contests all of the constituencies; in all but the last example (Figure 4.5(d)) the third party wins 10 per cent of the votes cast in every constituency.

In the first scenario (Figure 4.5(a)) the presence of a third party that wins votes but no seats results in the two largest parties receiving an increased return on their votes; this is because while their vote shares fall, their seat shares remain the same. Party Z has derived half of its votes from party X and half from party Y, but in total these are not sufficient in number for it to move into a winning position in any of the 25 constituencies. The overall effect is therefore to reduce the share of the votes for party X to 46.6 per cent and party Y to 43.4 per cent while they still win 10 and 14 seats respectively, with one

Figure 4.5 Constituency definition with three parties

65 <u>25</u> 10	65 <u>25</u> 10	65 <u>25</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10
65 <u>25</u> 10	60 <u>30</u> 10	60 <u>30</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10
65 <u>25</u> 10	55 <u>35</u> 10	55 <u>35</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10
60 <u>30</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10	45 <u>45</u> 10
35 <u>55</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	25 <u>65</u> 10

(a)

66 <u>24</u> 10	66 <u>24</u> 10	66 <u>24</u> 10	41 <u>49</u> 10	41 <u>49</u> 10
66 <u>24</u> 10	61 <u>29</u> 10	61 <u>29</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	41 <u>49</u> 10
66 <u>24</u> 10	56 <u>34</u> 10	56 <u>34</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10
61 <u>29</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	41 <u>49</u> 10	46 <u>44</u> 10
36 <u>54</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	41 <u>59</u> 10	36 <u>54</u> 10	26 <u>64</u> 10

(b)

63 <u>27</u> 10	63 <u>27</u> 10	63 <u>27</u> 10	38 <u>52</u> 10	38 <u>52</u> 10
63 <u>27</u> 10	58 <u>32</u> 10	68 <u>32</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	38 <u>52</u> 10
63 <u>27</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	53 <u>37</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10
58 <u>32</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	38 <u>52</u> 10	43 <u>47</u> 10
33 <u>57</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	38 <u>52</u> 10	33 <u>57</u> 10	23 <u>67</u> 10

(c)

69 <u>29</u> 2	68 <u>28</u> 4	68 <u>28</u> 4	43 <u>53</u> 4	43 <u>53</u> 4
69 <u>29</u> 2	60 <u>30</u> 10	60 <u>30</u> 10	35 <u>55</u> 10	40 <u>50</u> 10
69 <u>29</u> 2	55 <u>35</u> 10	45 <u>25</u> 30	25 <u>45</u> 30	35 <u>55</u> 10
64 <u>34</u> 2	35 <u>55</u> 10	25 <u>45</u> 30	30 <u>40</u> 30	45 <u>55</u> 10
38 <u>58</u> 4	38 <u>58</u> 4	43 <u>53</u> 4	38 <u>58</u> 4	25 <u>65</u> 10

(d)

Source: Reproduced from Johnston et al. (2001b: 45)

tied. This results in improved seats:votes ratios for the two parties: 0.86 compared to 0.78 for party X and 1.29 rather than 1.24 for Y.

The second scenario illustrates the impact of party Z winning its votes in a more unequal pattern from the two other parties. In Figure 4.5(b) the third party draws 60 per cent of its votes from party Y and the remaining 40 per cent from party X. Despite losing a larger number of its supporters than the latter, party Y gains from the increased strength of the third party (Z). Across the 25 constituencies, X wins 47.6 per cent of the votes and 44 per cent of the seats, resulting in a seats:votes ratio of 0.92, whereas Y has 42.4 per cent of the votes, wins 14 seats, and a ratio of 1.32. In this simulation the increased strength of party Z consequently has two impacts. Firstly, it reduces the size of the majority that Y achieves in seats where it defeats X, leading to a reduced number of surplus votes and thus a more efficient use of those which it receives. Secondly, in seats where X is the victor its majorities over Y are larger, driving its number of surplus votes upwards.

In Figure 4.5(c) the party that loses the most votes to the third party benefits the greatest. Party Z draws 70 per cent of its support from those who would have voted from party X and the remaining 30 per cent from Y. Although the number of seats that the two parties each win remains unchanged from the previous scenario, the number of surplus votes for party X falls because where it wins seats from Y it does so by a small majority, whereas when Y wins it does so by a much larger margin. Therefore, the more efficient distribution of votes for party X means that it benefits the most from the presence of party Z despite losing more of its voters.

Whereas party Z has won the same share of the vote (10 per cent) in every constituency in the first three scenarios, in Figure 4.5(d) it takes votes equally from the two main parties but wins more support in some constituencies than in others. Half of its votes are concentrated in just four constituencies – those where it wins 30 per cent of the votes – whilst the remainder of its vote is distributed unevenly across the other 21. Overall, the majority of its support is in constituencies won by party Y and it makes relatively little impact in those won by X. Party Y wins an identical number of seats as in the previous simulation (14) but with a reduced share of the votes cast (42.6 per cent compared to 45.4 per cent), resulting in an improvement in its seats:votes ratio from 1.23 to 1.31. Consequently, the success of party Z in a relatively small number of constituencies benefits party Y and its failure to attract support in constituencies where X is stronger results is to the detriment of the latter.

As these four examples therefore demonstrate, a third party does not have to win seats to either advantage or disadvantage one or other of the two main parties. Instead, how its votes are distributed geographically is more important, particularly if they are clustered in constituencies that are won by one of the two main parties rather than in those of the other. Third party votes can reduce the effective number of votes that are required for victory in a constituency and simultaneously reduce the number of surplus votes that the winning party accumulates.

The second assumption that was made was that all voters turnout and use their vote. In fact, this was the case in the example above in Figure 4.5, with every one of the 100 electors in the 25 constituencies casting their vote to produce the outcomes shown. It is rare for such levels of participation to be

recorded, however, and the period between 1885 and December 1910 was no exception. Turnout varied both across elections and between different regions and constituency types; the lowest turnout nationally, for example, was 79 per cent of the registered electorate in 1886 and the highest 92.5 per cent at the January 1910 general election.² Such variations are important because abstentions have the same impact on disproportionality and bias as third parties. If turnout levels vary across constituencies, some seats will be easier to win than others will because a smaller number of votes will be needed for victory. Consequently, a party that is strongest in areas of low turnout will benefit significantly more than a party whose main support is located in areas with higher rates of participation (Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 284; Johnston et al., 2001b: 46-7).

As well as acting independently of each other, third parties and abstentions can act together in two ways. In areas where turnout is low and support for third parties is at its greatest, the two variables could combine to substantially reduce the number of effective votes that are required for victory in certain constituencies, benefiting whichever of the two main parties has the highest level of support there. Alternatively, if the two variables are reversed, so that turnout is high but the support for third parties minimal, both of the main parties might gain – one from the level of participation and the other from the lack of support for third parties (Johnston et al., 2001b: 47). Therefore, as these examples illustrate, the overall impact of third parties and abstentions creates a form of malapportionment. Because some electors disenfranchise themselves either by not participating in an election or by choosing to cast their vote for a

² These differences are examined fully in chapter 6.

party that has a reduced chance of winning when compared to the two main parties, the number of votes that the latter require for victory is reduced. Depending on how the two variables are distributed across all the contested constituencies, then they will have a varying impact on the two main parties, thus creating disproportionality and bias.

The Causes of Bias

Three main sources of bias can therefore be identified: malapportionment, gerrymandering and reactive malapportionment. Each is inherently geographical, involving the geography of constituency boundaries and their sizes, the spatial distribution of support for the competing parties and the geography of abstentions (Johnston et al., 2001b: 95). Two of these sources (malapportionment and reactive malapportionment) can be further sub-divided, producing six specific bias components – Johnston et al. (2001b: 95) define these as:

1. Malapportionment – comprising:
 - inter-country differences in electoral quotas; and
 - intra-country variations in constituency sizes
2. Gerrymandering – defined as:
 - differences in the relative efficiency of the geography of support for each of the two main political parties
3. Reactive malapportionment – comprising:

- differences between the two main parties in the impact of votes for third parties;
- differences between the two main parties in the impact of victories by third parties; and
- differences between the two main parties in the impact of abstentions

An advantage of the bias measure outlined by Brookes is that it can be broken down into these constituent parts and the two chapters that follow explore the contributions of each component to the total bias in more detail. The full algebra for this decomposition procedure is reproduced in Appendix D of this study, and is also outlined in Johnston et al. (2001b: 229-30) and Johnston et al. (1999b).³ As with the overall bias index used in the previous chapter, the Brookes measure allows for the bias that resulted from each of the six individual components to be interpreted as the difference in the number of seats between the two main parties when they have equal vote shares. Similarly, each can also be positive or negative, with a positive value continuing to indicate a bias towards Liberals and a negative figure a pro-Conservative bias. Before quantifying the contribution of each component, however, it is important to define precisely how the theoretical examples outlined above operate in practice and how they relate to the nineteenth century.

³ Because of typographic errors in Johnston et al. (1999b), this should be read together with Johnston et al. (2000).

Malapportionment

Malapportionment can influence election results when the votes for one party are concentrated in smaller constituencies (in terms of the number of voters they contain rather than size) than those of another. Importantly however, as Johnston et al. (2001b: 91) argue, '[v]ariations in constituency size do not necessarily produce bias ... it only occurs when there is a differential geography of support for the parties according to constituency size'. This can arise in three ways: firstly, through the deliberate definition of constituencies so they are smaller in areas where one party dominates than in areas where the other party is stronger; secondly, by deliberately defining constituencies so that they are smaller in some parts of the electoral system than others, using criteria that are based on party strength; and, thirdly, through changes in the distribution of the population, so that constituencies that were once relatively equal in size become increasingly unequal (Johnston et al., 2001b: 91).

Each of these three contributory factors was present in nineteenth-century Britain. There were attempts at each of the three Reform Acts to practice deliberate malapportionment, as chapter five demonstrates, but it was not until the passage of House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1944 that these were finally prohibited. The second malapportionment strategy was enshrined in the various pieces of legislation that united the constituent nations of Britain. Scotland specifically and Wales were guaranteed a minimum number, or quota, of seats in Parliament, resulting in over-representation.⁴ This,

⁴ Scotland was guaranteed a minimum number by law and Wales by custom.

This is examined in more depth in chapter five.

combined with their smaller populations, meant that their constituencies were smaller than in England. As chapter two detailed, electoral support for the Liberals was stronger in these two nations than in England, and this should produce a biased outcome in their favour. The final malapportionment strategy – termed creeping malapportionment – is a consequence of the time that elapses between reviews of the map of constituencies. In the nineteenth century these intervals were substantial since reviews only took place at the same time as the three Reform Acts, creating the potential for substantial population redistributions to affect the equality of constituency electorates. These could favour one party over another depending on the period of time between reviews.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering can result from one or a combination of two processes: first, because the geographies of support for the political parties differ, the votes for one party may be distributed more efficiently across the constituencies than those for other parties; and second, because the parties may be able to influence the precise definition of constituency boundaries in such a way that they can bring about a more efficient distribution of their votes compared to their rivals (Johnston et al., 2001b: 93).

During the nineteenth century it was the first of these processes which contributed to this component. The increasing geographical concentration of electoral support for the Liberals and the inability of the Conservatives to win seats in areas outside of their southern English heartland helped to ensure that

the former achieved a more efficient distribution of votes. Secondly, the role of politicians in deciding the allocation of new Parliamentary seats in 1884 ensured that even in the absence of a concerted strategy of deliberate gerrymandering these were placed in areas of Liberal strength. The bias in the efficiency component was ultimately the result of the changing geography of effective, surplus and wasted votes within the map of Parliamentary boundaries.

Reactive malapportionment

Reactive malapportionment can have the same outcome as malapportionment – one party benefits because it is electorally stronger in the constituencies where fewer effective votes are required for victory – but not as a consequence of the drawing of constituency boundaries to produce constituencies that are smaller in those areas. Instead, it is the result of the relaxation of the assumption that all contests are between two parties in which all electors vote. As the examples above showed variations in turnout levels and support for third parties across constituencies can influence both the results in individual seats and, cumulatively, the overall amount of bias in the electoral system. This can happen in three ways, each directly related to the fact that either a third party or the number of abstentions reduces the number of votes that are needed to win a constituency (Johnston et al., 2001b: 93-5):

First, one party can be advantaged over another if the votes for third parties are concentrated in particular constituencies. Second, the more votes won by a third parties, the greater the return to the main parties: because they would get the same share of the seats with a smaller share of the votes their seats:votes

ratios would increase. Finally, abstentions can have a differential impact on the parties if they are higher in the seats won by one party compared to those won by the others – the greater the number of individuals who chose not to vote the larger the reduction in the effective number of votes required for victory. This was an important factor towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the period stretching from 1886 to 1900 and again at the general election of December 1910, for example, the Conservatives were the main beneficiaries of abstentions and of votes for and victories by third parties.

Total Bias and the Contribution of the Components

Table 4.2 shows the contribution of each of the six components outlined above to the bias index for the period 1885-December 1910. This includes two separate bias figures, one for the net amount and another for the total volume. The bias trend that is outlined in the previous chapter (in Figure 3.8, for example) is a net figure, the result of a party gaining from some components whilst at the same time being disadvantaged by others. Although it is an aggregate of the six components incorporating the sum, these do not accurately sum to the net amount shown because the various interaction terms between them are not shown (see Johnston et al., 2001b: 102n). In contrast, the total volume of bias is the sum of the components irrespective of sign and, as Figure 4.6 underlines, was much greater. Other than at the 1886 general election, this mirrored the trend in net bias, reaching its highest level of the period in 1906 at 165 seats – accounting for some 29 per cent of the 659 seats in the House of Commons – before declining slightly at the two elections of 1910.

Although the British electoral system was biased throughout the 25-year period after the Third Reform Act, it was substantially more biased from the 1906 election onwards. At the first election of the sequence in 1885 total bias was over double the net bias because of the substantial Conservative

Table 4.2 Bias components at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910, with equal vote shares⁵

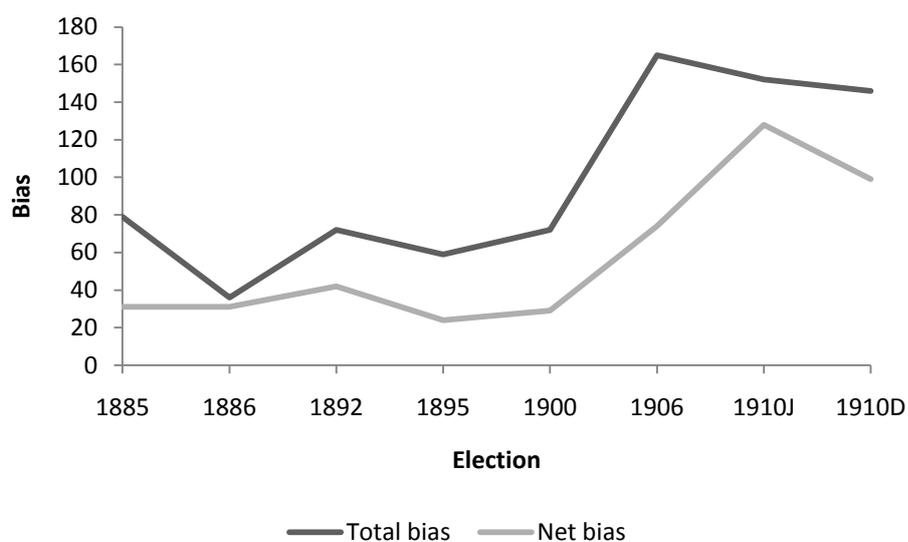
Election	NEQ	CSV	G	TPV	TPW	A	TB	NB
1885	3	-31	5	-2	-37	1	79	-31
1886	5	-9	-15	-1	-3	-3	36	-31
1892	5	9	46	-4	-2	-6	72	42
1895	6	18	21	-5	-2	-7	59	24
1900	5	15	31	-6	3	-12	72	29
1906	3	-33	101	-10	18	0	165	74
1910 (January)	5	12	80	-8	46	-1	152	128
1910 (December)	3	9	91	-11	22	-10	146	99

Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

⁵ Key to bias components shown in table: NEQ – national electoral quotas; CSV – constituency size variations; G – gerrymander/efficiency; TPV – third party votes; TPW – third party wins; A – abstentions; TB – total bias (sum of preceding components irrespective of sign); NB – net bias (this will not equal the sum of the preceding components because of the omission of the interaction terms from the table). Johnston et al. (2001b: 96) provide an identical table, including a component that separates out the impact of the larger constituency sizes in Northern Ireland from the constituency size variations component over the period 1950-70, for UK general elections between 1950 and 1997.

advantage in the constituency size variations and third party wins components. At the next election, in the following year, the gap between the total and net bias closed as the Conservatives expanded their advantage across all but one of the components, although not to the same extent as at the previous contest. From 1892 onwards, however, total bias rose because the Conservative advantage was increasingly countered by the Liberals, particularly on the gerrymander (or efficiency) component; between 1906 and December 1910 the pro-Liberal advantage on this component was roughly three times that of 1900.

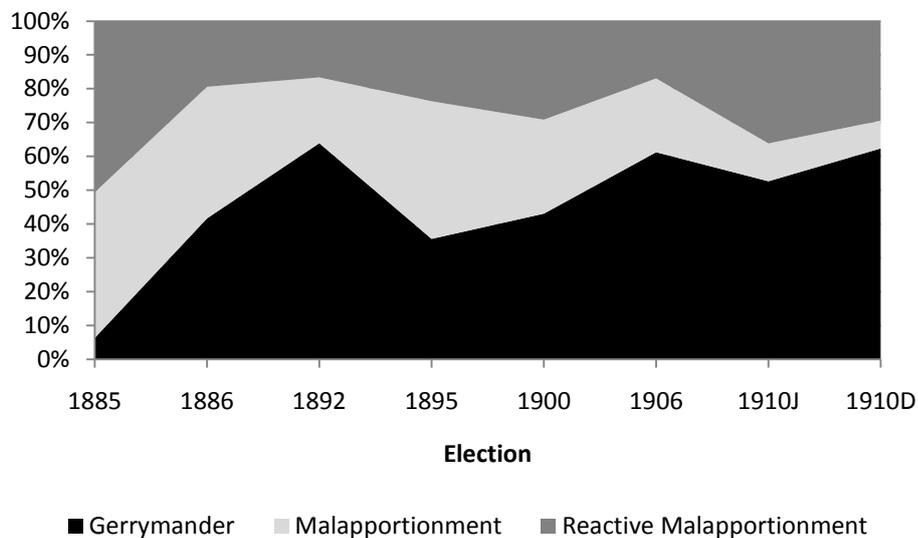
Figure 4.6 Total and net bias at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The overall contribution of the individual components to the total bias is shown in Figure 4.7, in which they have been grouped together into the three main sources of bias (malapportionment, gerrymander and reactive malapportionment) outlined above. Each is shown as a percentage of the total

Figure 4.7 Contributions to total bias of three main sources of bias at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910



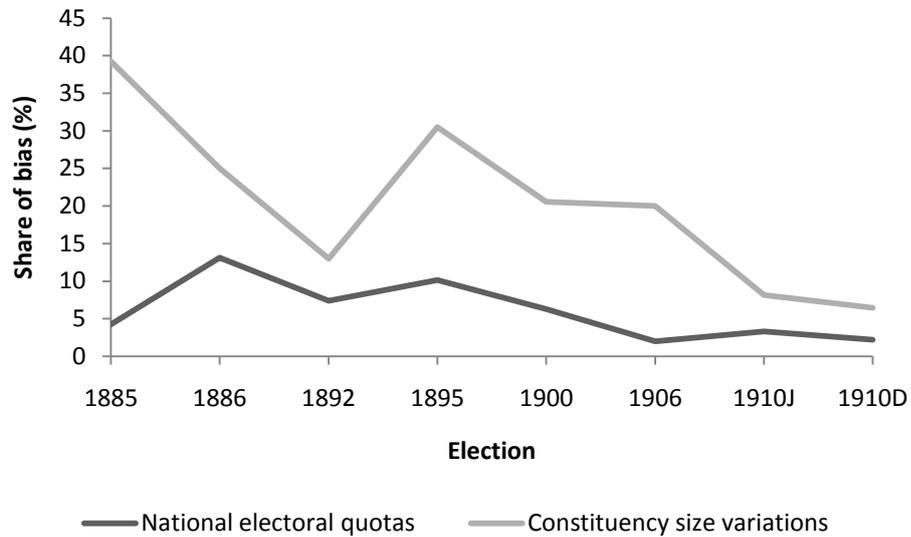
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

bias, having been calculated by summing its components, irrespective of sign. The largest percentage contribution was from the gerrymander group, which accounted for an average of 46 per cent of the total volume of bias at the eight general elections beginning in 1885. Its importance increased substantially after 1885, peaking at 64 per cent of the total volume in 1892. Although it declined in importance in 1895 and 1900, it increased again to 61, 53 and 62 per cent of the total volume of bias at the next three elections. The malapportionment group (national electoral quotas and constituency size variations) declined significantly over the period – from 43 per cent of the total volume in 1885 to only eight per cent in December 1910 – apart from a brief resurgence in 1895 and 1900. This can be attributed to the importance of the gerrymander component and the third grouping of reactive malapportionment (abstentions, third party votes and third party wins) components. Having been the largest of the three sources in 1885,

contributing 51 per cent of the total bias, it was squeezed first by the gerrymander component in 1886 and 1892 and then by the malapportionment element in 1895. By the two elections of 1910, however, reactive malapportionment was clearly the second largest contributor to the total. Overall, therefore, the gerrymander component was the primary source of electoral bias in Britain for the majority of the period after the Third Reform Act, with the reactive malapportionment equivalent second in importance to it.

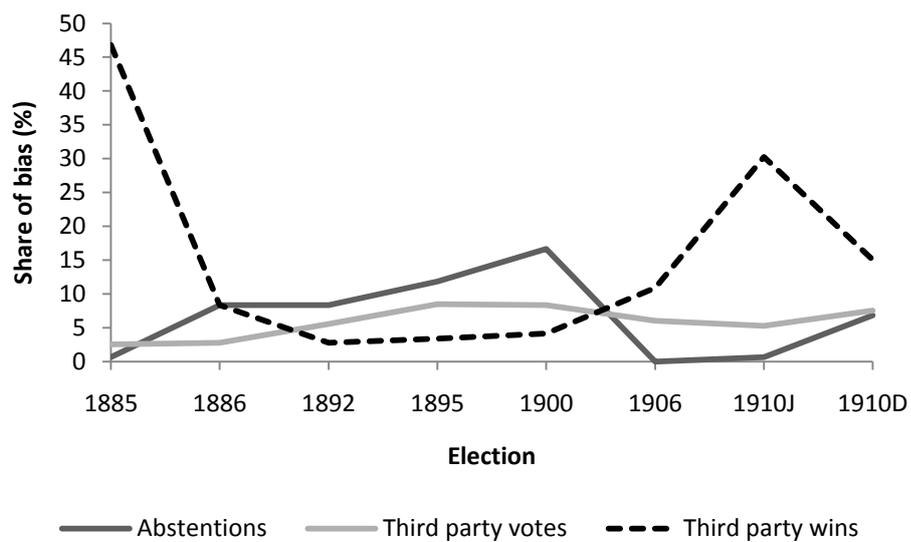
These changes in the malapportionment and reactive malapportionment groupings components are shown in greater detail by Figures 4.8 and 4.9, which show the contributions of their respective components to the overall total (Figure 4.7). Because the contribution of the national electoral quotas component to malapportionment was relatively small throughout the period, averaging six per cent, the decline in the overall importance of the grouping can instead be attributed to the gradual decline in the relative importance of constituency size variations. These were responsible for 39 per cent of the total bias in 1885, but declined initially to 13 per cent in 1892 and then, after a resurgence during the intervening period, to six per cent in December 1910. The contrasting rise in importance for the reactive malapportionment component can be attributed to two factors: firstly, the contribution of the abstentions component in 1900 and, second, the increase in the third party wins component at the two general elections in 1910. In the case of the latter, the improving electoral performance of the Labour party was clearly integral to the increased levels of bias in British electoral system by the end of the 25-year period after the Third Reform Act.

Figure 4.8 Trends in the two malapportionment bias components as percentages of the total, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

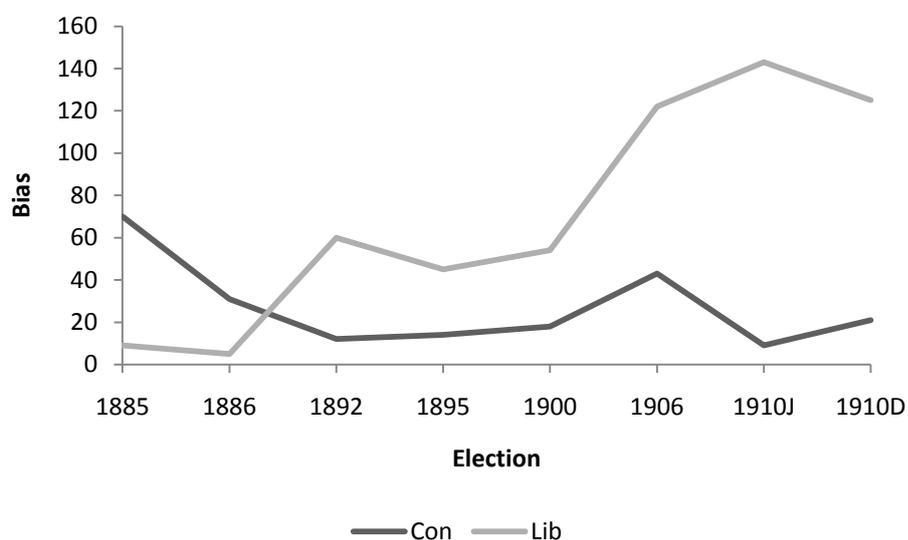
Figure 4.9 Trends in the reactive malapportionment bias component as a percentage of the total, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Finally, it is possible to examine the total bias for each of the two main parties, calculated by summing all of the negative biases for the Conservatives and all of the positive biases for the Liberals. As Figure 4.10 shows, despite the constituency system being unchanged over the entire 25-year period, its impact on the different relative performances of the two main parties, in terms of seats won, became larger over time. The Conservatives experienced an overall decline, with the various biases collectively worth 21 seats in December 1910, compared to 70 in 1885. In contrast, there was a substantial increase in the seat-winning ability of the Liberals. Although the various bias together were worth only nine and five seats at the first two elections of the period, this rose to over 120 from 1906 onwards, including a peak figure of 143 in January 1910.

Figure 4.10 Trends in total bias for the Conservative and Liberal parties, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Summary

This chapter has shown that biased electoral outcomes can be created by three different sets of factors: malapportionment, gerrymandering and reactive malapportionment. These can be created either deliberately – through the drawing of constituency boundaries in such a way that they favour one party instead of another for example – or accidentally, for instance through the distribution of votes for a third party in areas where one of the main parties is particularly strong, reducing the number of votes needed for victory.

It was a combination of these three components that generated the bias noted in the last chapter. Each was to be found in operation at general elections between 1885 and December 1910, although to a varying degree at each contest. At the start of the period all reactive malapportionment was the largest contributor to the overall amount of bias, followed by malapportionment and then gerrymandering. Eight elections later the picture was somewhat different, with the gerrymander component having grown in strength to the extent that it accounted for over half of the total bias. While the contribution of many of the sub-components remained relatively unchanged over the period, the contribution of third party wins and, particularly, variations in constituency sizes to their respective bias components help to account for the decline in their share of the total bias overall. All these changes were predominately to the benefit of the Liberals. Whereas the advantage that the Conservatives derived from the electoral system decreased steadily over the period, the pro-Liberal electoral bias grew significantly from a single-figure number of Parliamentary seats in the mid 1880s to well over 100 by the two general elections of 1910. The next three

chapters examine each of the main components – malapportionment, gerrymandering and reactive malapportionment – in more detail.

Chapter 5

The Impact of Differences in Constituency Sizes

Introduction

This chapter examines the first set of components producing bias in the electoral system, namely variations in the sizes of constituency electorates and the impact of national electoral 'quotas'. Both individually and collectively these produce a product that is the equivalent of the practice of malapportionment, which can be defined as 'the discrepancy between the shares of legislative seats and the shares of population held by geographical units' (Samuels and Snyder, 2001: 652). Electoral systems are usually described as being either perfectly proportioned, where no citizen's vote weighs more than any other's, or malapportioned. There are few examples of perfectly apportioned electoral systems – Samuels and Snyder (2001) identify the lower Parliamentary chambers of Namibia, Peru and Sierra Leone as fitting the relevant criteria, as well as the Israeli Knesset and The Netherlands where members are elected by proportional representation from a single, national district.

In a malapportioned system, by contrast, the votes of some citizens count for more than the votes of others. For example, if one voter lives in a constituency that is half the size of a neighbouring one, their vote is worth only half that of a voter in the other constituency. Such a discrepancy can have significant political ramifications: in terms of democratic theory, for example, malapportionment

violates the 'one person, one vote' principle which Dahl (1971: 2) considers to be a necessary condition for democratic government. The apportionment of seats within the two chambers of the United States Congress provides one of the clearest examples of malapportionment (see Altman, 1998).¹ Within the Senate the US Constitution apportions political power equally among the states of the union irrespective of their size or population; consequently, each state has two of the 100 seats and no one state wields more power than any other.²

¹ Other examples of malapportioned electoral systems are Australia (Jackman, 1994), where all states elect 12 Senators regardless of their population, Japan (Baker and Scheiner, 2007; Christensen and Johnson, 1995; Gallagher, 2001; Horiuchi, 2003), where rural prefectures are over-represented in comparison to urban prefectures, Spain and the European Parliament. In the latter the distribution of seats among the states of the European Union is carried out according to the principle of 'degressive proportionality' – the larger the state, the more citizens that are represented per MEP – laid out in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. The bias that results from the use of an electoral college to elect the President of the United States also creates a degree of malapportionment – see Johnston et al. (2005).

² Until the enactment of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, which provided for the direct election of Senators by the people of a state, this system of apportionment made some sense because they were nominated by state legislatures. Up to this point it was argued that the people of each state also indirectly elected the Senators as they elected their state legislators. The groups disadvantaged by Senate malapportionment are explored in Griffin (2006), Lee and Oppenheimer (1999) and Malhotra and Raso (2007).

Seats in the House of Representatives are apportioned among the states through a two stage process. First the 435 seats of the House are apportioned among the states based on the relative population of each state in the total population of the union. It is then the responsibility of each state to divide its geographical area into equally populous single member electoral districts from which representatives will be elected to serve in the House of Representatives. This process is repeated after every decennial census to take into account population changes and, as a consequence, it is usual for states to lose or gain seats and for each state to need to redraw the boundaries of its districts (Balinski and Young 1982; Kromkowski 2002).

As Cox and Katz (1999) argue, within such a system there is great potential for malapportionment to occur, particularly when it is left to the states themselves to decide on the actual apportion of seats. Several notable legal battles were fought in the early 1960s, such as *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Sims*, which challenged the failure of numerous state apportionment systems to take into account population changes during the first half of the twentieth century and to carry out redistricting exercises to ensure equal electorates (Johnston et al., 2001b: 110; Dixon, 1968; Eagles 1990).³ It is also significant that it is the responsibility of each State's legislature to draw district lines.

³ *Baker v. Carr* was a landmark judgement. By deciding that reapportionment issues could be dealt with by the federal courts it marked an about-turn from their previous stance that they lay outside of their remit. This has subsequently been clarified further by *Karcher v. Daggett* which established deviation in population as the only grounds on which malapportionment could be challenged (Forgette and Winkle, 2006: 158).

Because these are elected political bodies many legislatures have historically been reluctant to engage in reapportionment exercises for fear of changing the composition of electoral populations in districts in case they should threaten their re-election, or weaken their party's political power.⁴ As Forgette and Winkle (2006: 155) contend, 'political gerrymandering—drawing legislative lines to advantage a group or individual—is often viewed as a pervasive and inescapable reality of the American redistricting process'.

However, studies of the United States aside, malapportionment has been largely neglected within the electoral studies literature (Samuels and Snyder, 2001: 651-2; cf. Monroe (1994), Lijphart (1994: 124-30), Grofman et al. (1997), Johnston et al. (1999c)). In terms of Britain, studies of malapportionment have been limited to examinations of the periodic reviews of constituency boundaries for both Parliamentary (for example, Johnston et al., 2001b: 103-28) and local

⁴ In many states throughout the US, malapportionment had racial as well as political overtones (see, for example, Overby and Cosgrove, 1996; Lublin, 1997; Cannon, 1999; LeVeaux and Garand, 2003). For example, during much of the twentieth century in southern states the Democratic rural areas dominated urban Republican strongholds by allowing the representation of the latter to remain constant even as their populations began to rise considerably. More recent incidents of malapportionment include the electoral districts proposed in Tennessee following the 1990 census which systematically overrepresented the then predominantly Democratic rural west of the state at the expense of then predominantly Republican rural east, and the boundary proposals in Georgia after the 2000 census which systematically underpopulated seats then held by Democrats and overpopulated then Republican-held seats throughout the state.

council elections (Rallings et al., 2004). Before their implementation under the provisions of the 1944 House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act only cursory attempts were made to reduce the variations in size between Parliamentary constituencies and there were, consequently, often significant differences in electorate size between Parliamentary constituencies. This was particularly the case during the nineteenth century when the progressive extension of the franchise was accompanied by a major redistribution of the population, with a significant and sustained out-migration from rural areas fuelling the rapid growth of cities.

This chapter evaluates the extent of malapportionment during the period between the Third Reform Act and the general election of December 1910. It looks first at how the constituent nations of Britain were treated differently as they were incorporated into the union, and how the implementation of implicit 'national electoral quotas' resulted in differential constituency sizes across the three, before moving on to consider how these varied within each individual nation. Variations in constituency sizes at these two levels had an important effect on the degree of the bias due to the specific geographies of support for the Conservative and Liberal parties.

National Electoral Quotas

Variations in constituency sizes play a key role in creating malapportionment and can be analysed at two scales, the first being at the national level which this section considers. There were important differences in constituency sizes between the nations of Britain during the nineteenth century that were created

by what Johnston et al. (2001b: 103) term 'national electoral quotas'. These were introduced in the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1944 which established rules that guaranteed Scotland and Wales a minimum level of representation, and further modified by the 1958 amendments to the Act so that each was given a separate quota (Rossiter et al., 1999: 71, 182). However, although this was the first time that such quotas were formally enshrined in legislation, they had in fact been in operation for much of the previous four centuries. Beginning with the annexation of Wales by England during the mid-fifteenth century, and succeeded by the terms of the Union of England and Scotland in 1707, each of the constituent countries of Britain was allocated a number of seats in the Westminster Parliament that was unrelated to either its geographical area or the size of its population or electorate. The result of this was identical to the impact of the application of national electoral quotas in post-World War Two Britain: over-representation of Scotland and Wales (and Ireland) in comparison to England.

As Rossiter et al. (1999: 11) argue, the system of Parliamentary representation 'evolved largely in England and for England, but over the intervening centuries between the thirteenth and the nineteenth it had to incorporate the three separate countries which were joined to England – Wales, Scotland and Ireland – and granted representation in its Parliament'. Despite the inclusion of new members in the chamber of the House of Commons over this period, the total number of Parliamentary seats changed infrequently, often increasing or decreasing by just a few seats. Indeed, when the House of Commons was first established under the terms of the Magna Carta in 1215 the size of the House of Commons was determined not by a desire to ensure some

degree of equality of representation but by a decision that all barons were entitled to attend Parliament, with early increases in its size being the result of the creation of additional baronies through writs of summons.⁵ By 1254 this hereditary right had been replaced by a system that was based on the two key units of English territorial organisation, with every county and borough entitled to send two members each (Rossiter et al., 1999: 8-9).

The number of Parliamentary seats increased only slightly over the next 500 years before being fixed at 558 in the Acts of Union with Scotland in 1707. Thereafter the size of the House of Commons did not rise again until the 1800 Act of Union which resulted in the addition of an extra 100 seats specifically for MPs from the newly incorporated constituencies in Ireland without removing representation from elsewhere in Britain. This decision to increase the size of the House of Commons to incorporate representatives from Ireland was a marked contrast to the failure to do the same when Wales and Scotland were united with England. Similarly, an increase to 670 that was included in the Third Reform Act in 1885 was to provide an extra 12 members for Scotland without having to disenfranchise or reduce the level of representation in other, existing constituencies. The size of the House of Commons subsequently fell to 621 in 1921 with the departure of southern Ireland from the United Kingdom although post- World War Two boundary revisions have seen the size of Parliament gradually increase to its current 646 seats.

Specific national electoral quotas – that is, guaranteed minimum levels of representation in terms of Parliamentary seats – were established when first the

⁵ A writ of summons established the hereditary right of an individual to attend Parliament. Without the writ no peer could sit or vote in Parliament.

Scottish and then Irish parliaments were integrated into the House of Commons. Under the Acts of Union of the English and Scottish Parliaments in 1707 Scotland was allocated 45 seats, a figure stipulated by Article XXII of the Act which provided, 'that by virtue of this Treaty of the Peers of Scotland at the time of Union Sixteen shall be the number to sit and vote in the House of Lords and Forty five the number of the Representatives of Scotland in the House of Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain' (UK Parliament, 2007: 10). A second article of the Act went further, specifying how these seats were to be split between the burghs and the counties. Article XXV section VI stated that the counties were to be represented by 30 members, with the six smallest counties grouped together in pairs with only one of each pair to be represented at any one time; in terms of the burghs, Edinburgh was to be a single-member constituency with the 14 remaining Scottish MPs to represent groups of burghs (McLean, 1995: 256).

The Acts of Union between Scotland and England, then, established a guaranteed minimum level of representation for Scotland in the Parliament of the newly formed Kingdom of Great Britain as well as specifying the allocation of these seats across the two constituency types. Between 1707 and the First Reform Act Scottish representation remained unchanged but from 1832 onwards it was gradually increased – to 53 seats in 1832, 55 in 1868, 72 in 1885 and 74 in 1918. The increase in 1868 was due to the creation of two university seats in Scotland, with the universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow combined as one seat and Edinburgh and St. Andrews as a second (Reeve and Ware, 1992: 47). The Speaker's Conference of 1944 recommended an increase in the electoral quota for Scotland, something that was then enacted by the

1944 Act, and it remained unchanged at either 71 or 72 seats after all boundary change exercises between then and the Fifth Periodic Review of Scottish seats at Westminster which reported before the 2005 election.

Ireland – in a manner identical to Scotland – was allocated a specific number of seats in the House of Commons when it merged with the Kingdom of Great Britain through the provisions of the Act of Union 1800. In actuality two separate pieces of legislation, the Union with Ireland Act 1800 (an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain) and the Act of Union (Ireland) 1800 (an Act of the Parliament of Ireland), ratified eight articles, the first four of which dealt with the political aspects of the union. Most significantly, these provided for Ireland having 100 members representing it in the House of Commons of the united Parliament as well as 32 seats in the House of Lords.⁶ The level of representation enjoyed by Ireland fluctuated over the course of the century, however, as its allowance was first increased to 105 by the 1832 Reform Act and then reduced to 103 under the provisions of the Third Reform Act. The creation of a new system of self-government for Ireland under the framework provided by the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 resulted in the removal of all Irish representation from the House of Commons apart from the 12 seats that were retained for Northern Ireland (Rossiter et al., 1999: 11).

Whereas the level of Scottish and Irish representation was fixed at the time of their union with England, no such provisions were made in the case of Wales. Although the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535-42 annexed Wales as part of England and brought Welsh representatives to Parliament, they did not stipulate any

⁶ This was comprised of 28 life peers and four clergymen from the Church of Ireland who were chosen for each session.

particular level of representation. Initially 24 seats were set aside at Westminster for Wales but this allocation saw modest increases over the next 350 years. By the First Reform Act in 1832 it had risen by three seats to 27 and the latter legislation increased the Welsh allowance further to a total of 31. The Second and Third Reform Acts added two and one additional seats respectively, raising Welsh representation in the House of Commons to an overall total of 34 seats, a level that persisted until the recommendations of the 1944 Speaker's Conference were enacted.⁷ In fact, it was not until 1944 that Wales was specifically allocated a quota of seats in the Commons on the basis of a guaranteed minimum level of representation – previously this had been based on custom and any increases had been achieved 'on merit' rather than in

⁷ The figures here include seats the borough and county seats apportioned to Monmouthshire. Customarily these seats have been included in studies of Welsh representation despite the considerable ambiguity over the Welsh status of Monmouthshire. Following the Laws in Wales Act 1535 the county occupied an ambiguous position whereby it was treated as a part of England for administrative purposes but ruled by the Marcher Lords. At the division of England and Wales into registration areas in the nineteenth century, Monmouthshire was included in the Welsh division, which was defined as comprising 'Monmouthshire, South Wales and North Wales'; however, the Local Government Act 1933 listed both the administrative county of Monmouth and the county borough of Newport as part of England. The issue was finally clarified in law by the Local Government Act 1972, which provided that in legislation after 1974 the definition of 'Wales' would include the area of Monmouthshire.

the interests of maintaining some degree of proportionality (Johnston et al., 2001b: 55).

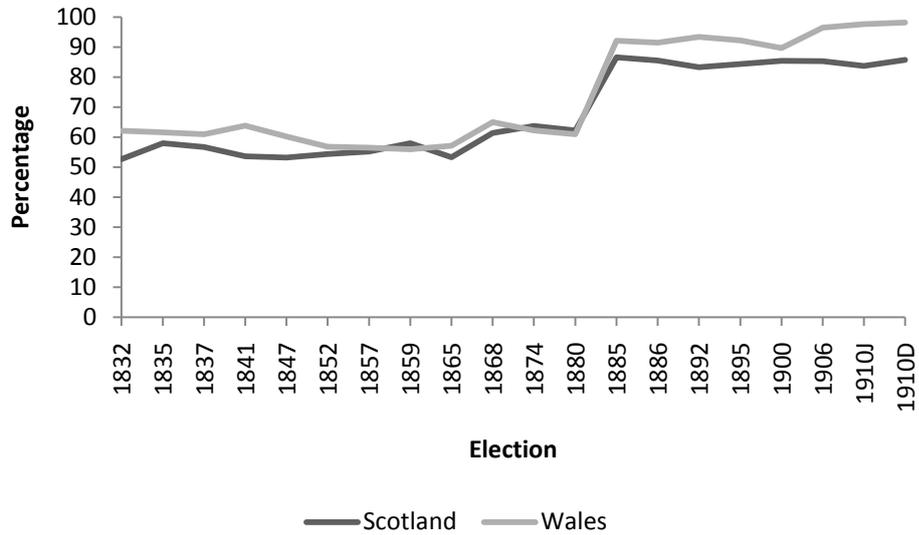
These formal, in the case of Scotland, and informal, in the case of Wales, rules ensured that the two nations had smaller average constituencies than England. This is borne out by Figure 5.1, which plots the average constituency electorates in Scotland and Wales as a proportion of those in England between 1832 and December 1910. Up until the general election of 1880 constituencies in the two former nations were half to two-thirds the size of their English counterparts. While the redrawing of constituencies because of the Third Reform Act reduced the disparity between nations, those in Scotland only gradually increased to a position of near parity with those in England, although as before 1885, they continued to lag behind being only around 80 per cent of the size of those in England.

The post-1884 situation can be further clarified by examining the average constituency size in each of the three countries for the eight general elections that followed the Third Reform Act (Figure 5.2). The average constituency size increased in all three countries between 1885 and December 1910, particularly in England where it rose from 9,365 at the first election of the period to 13,139 in December 1910, a figure slightly lower than that at the previous election of that year (13,217). Scottish constituency averages rose less than in Wales: 8,107 to 11,268 compared with 8,625 to 12,901. Despite the continued disparity in average constituency sizes across the three nations each displayed similar levels of growth in their electorates. The constituency average in England increased by 140 per cent between 1885 and December 1910 compared with 139 per cent in Wales and 150 per cent in Scotland.

As Figure 5.3 demonstrates, these differences produced a bias in favour of the Liberals at each of the elections from 1885 to December 1910 (as in all the figures showing the bias components, a positive bias favours the Liberals and a negative bias the Conservatives). In terms of the total amount of bias shown in the previous chapter, the contribution of this component was extremely small, only contributing between two and five seats to the total with some 104 constituencies involved in Scotland and Wales. The general trend over the 25-year period was one of no change, with the component being worth an identical number of seats to the Liberals at the 1910 (December) election as it had been in 1885.

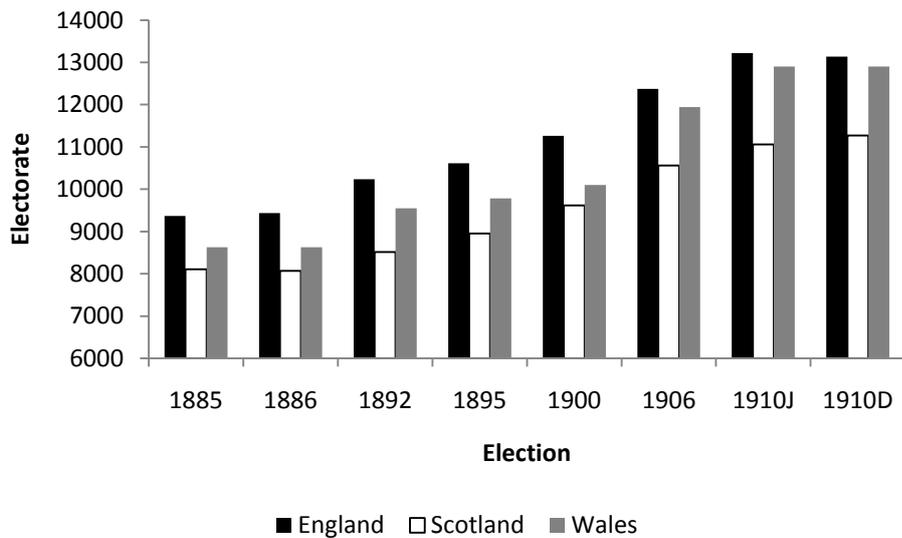
The reason for the pro-Liberal bias is made clear by the graphs in chapter two showing support for the three parties in each of the countries. In both Scotland and Wales the Liberals were the stronger of the two main political groupings and the bias is a consequence of its relative strength in these countries in comparison to England. Just as Johnston et al. (2001b: 106) note in the case of a (more substantial) pro-Labour national electoral quota bias in post-World War Two Britain, this pro-Liberal bias reflects a combination of two factors: the differential in terms of the relative size of their constituencies (Figures 5.1 and 5.2) between England and Scotland and Wales, and the relative strength of the Liberals in the former nations throughout the period from 1885 through to December 1910.

Figure 5.1 Average constituency electorates in Scotland and Wales as a proportion of those in England, 1832-December 1910



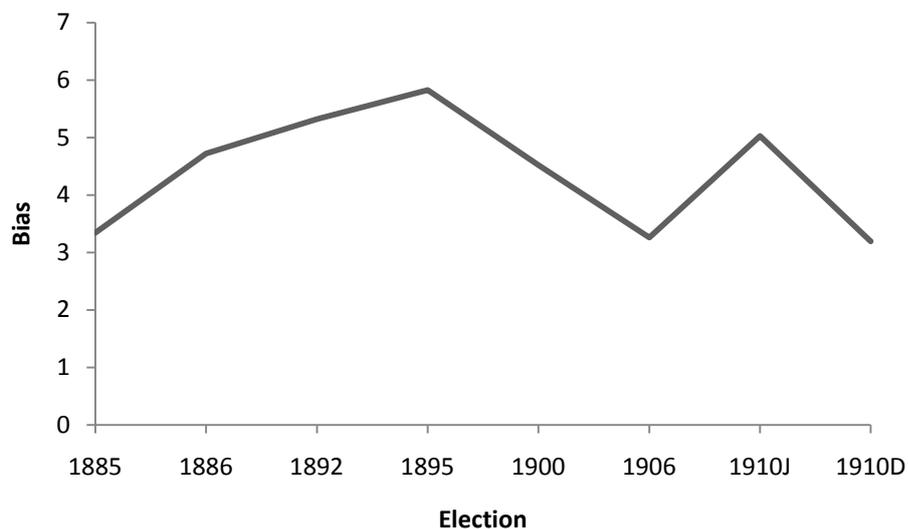
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 5.2 Average constituency electorates in England, Scotland and Wales, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 5.3 Bias in the general election results 1885-December 1910 due to differences in national electoral quotas (if parties had equal vote shares)



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Variations in Constituency Sizes

As well as variations in the average constituency size between England, Scotland and Wales, there were also differences between constituency electorates within each country. In Lancashire in 1885, for example, the smallest county constituency (Widnes in the Southwest division of the county) contained 8,223 registered electors while the largest (Bootle, also in the Southwest division) contained 14,633, a figure which equates to 178 per cent more voters. Similarly unequal district sizes could also be found amongst borough constituencies. Looking again at Lancashire in 1885, there was a difference of some 10,266 electors between the smallest borough (Barrow-in-

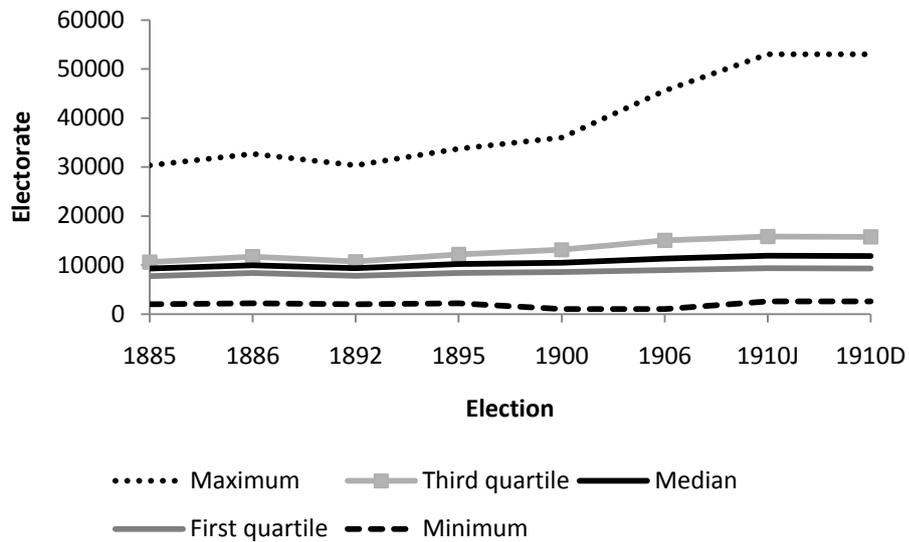
Furness with 6,063 registered voters) and the largest (Blackburn with 16,329).⁸ Such disparities were not limited to county constituencies or to areas with large urban populations: in Cornwall in 1885, for instance, the largest electoral district contained 6,735 more registered voters than the smallest.⁹ These examples all suggest that electoral districts varied greatly in size and, coupled with the substantial increase in and redistribution of the population in nineteenth century without an accompanying redrawing of constituency boundaries, it was these differences that contributed to a process of creeping malapportionment in nineteenth-century Britain.

The full extent of the differences in constituency sizes in Britain is captured by Figure 5.4, where the constituencies have been divided into four equal groups or quartiles. This reveals several significant trends, in particular the increasing gap between the smallest and largest constituencies in Britain. Although the minimum electorate remained fairly stable, increasing from 2,015 in 1885 to 2,601 by December 1910, the number of electors in the largest constituency increased by 22,688 individuals over the same period of time, from 30,314 to

⁸ The actual disparity between the largest and smallest borough constituencies may have been far greater than this. Oldham was reputed to have 25,600 registered voters but this number included an unknown number of duplicate registrations. If such a figure was accurate the actual disparity in registered electors between the largest and smallest borough constituencies in Lancashire in 1885 would be 19,537, some 9,271 higher.

⁹ The smallest Parliamentary seat was the borough constituency of Penryn and Falmouth with an electorate of 2,562; the largest was the northeast county division (also known as Launceston) with 9,297.

Figure 5.4 Variations in electorate sizes at general elections in Britain, 1885-December 1910, by constituency



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 5.5 Bias in the general election results 1885-December 1910 due to constituency size variations (if parties had equal vote shares)



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

53,002. Most of the constituencies cluster tightly around the median value – half fall between the first and third quartiles – which, over course of the eight general elections, increased by only a moderate amount from 9,314 electors to 11,839. The increase in the range (the difference between the smallest and largest constituencies) was driven primarily by the largest constituencies becoming bigger, whilst the small- and medium-sized constituencies experienced only moderate increases in their electorates.

The size and direction of the bias resulting from constituency size variations is shown in Figure 5.5. For the first two elections in the sequence there was a bias favouring the Conservatives, although this declined from 31 seats at the 1885 contest to only nine in 1886. At the next three elections there was a reversal of the bias to the benefit of the Liberals, worth 9, 18 and 15 seats in 1892, 1895 and 1900 respectively. Interestingly the 1906 election saw a sharp reversal of this pattern in favour of the Conservatives, with a bias of 33 seats in their favour, the largest such advantage in period between the Third Reform Act and the general election of December 1910, and an anomaly in the general trend. There is no obvious explanation for this except perhaps that this period coincided with the increased suburbanisation of the population in Tory areas, adding to the volatility of constituency sizes in these regions (see Chapter 7). The fact that this marked bias in the 1906 election did not stop the Liberal landslide also indicates the minimal impact that this type of bias had on the electoral system as a whole, accounting for just five per cent of Parliamentary seats, although it could be argued that it took a particularly strong showing by the Liberals to counteract it. At the next two general elections in 1910 the direction of the bias moved back in favour of the Liberals although it continued

its downward trend, the brief reversal in 1906 aside, that had begun in 1900, amounting first to 12 seats at the January contest and then nine in December. Perhaps the most important observation to make of constituency size variations in this time frame is how variable they were, both in terms of direction and extent, making it difficult to discern and explain long-term trends, except to say that they fit with wider inconsistencies and shifts in other aspects of the electoral geography, such as the distribution of support for the two main parties.

The Process of Building Constituencies

The variations in constituency size that caused this bias can be directly attributed to the system used to define Parliamentary constituencies in nineteenth century Britain. With the notable exception of those representing the university seats, it was the norm for Members of Parliament to be elected to represent divisions of the national territory – constituencies – just as they continue to be now. To do this some kind of scheme has to be used to either divide the territory up into smaller units or to combine smaller areas to create a much larger one – an approach that is explicitly geographical (Johnston et al., 2001b: 21). In the case of post World War Two Britain the non-partisan periodic reviews undertaken by the Boundary Commissions have conventionally sought to build Parliamentary constituencies by amalgamating smaller administrative units, namely local government electoral wards (Johnston et al., 2001b: 50-89; Rossiter et al., 1999: 76-331).

The origins of the Parliamentary constituencies in use during the nineteenth century were, however, somewhat different, having arisen first through custom

before being subdivided – the opposite of the postwar situation. The map of borough and county constituencies from which MPs were elected to the House of Commons in the nineteenth century can be directly traced back to the decisions taken when the Parliamentary system of representative government was first instigated in eleventh and twelfth century England. These developments were driven, Rossiter et al. (1999: 8) argue, not by popular agitation for greater citizen involvement in decision making but rather by the needs of successive monarchs for legitimisation of and support for their actions – in particular those that depended on taxation of the general population. The structure of Parliament that was chosen at this point in time – one that was focused on representatives returned from the counties and boroughs of the nation – then persisted for another 600 years.

The counties and the boroughs each had different origins, far removed from their intended use as the building blocks of a representative system. English boroughs were major medieval towns and cities which had obtained royal charters that granted or confirmed their privileges – to create and hold a market, specific trading rights or to hunt in park or chase, as well as a measure of self-government, for example. The first charters were granted in the mid-eleventh century and the practice continued through until the end of the seventeenth, although many of the later charters were confirmations of earlier grants.¹⁰ When Scotland later joined with England under the 1707 Act of Union its burghs were incorporated into the House of Commons as equivalents of English boroughs,

¹⁰ Lists of borough charters can be found in Ballard (1913), Tait (1923) and Weinbaum (1943). For further discussion of the English borough see Reynolds (1977) and Platt (1976).

although they had slightly different origins and there were two different types. Royal burghs were quite unlike their English counterparts because, although established by a royal charter and granted some degree of self-government and defined trading privileges, their lands were held directly from the crown. The second type of burgh was the so-called 'burghs of barony'; these were towns that usually lacked an elected council or any access to foreign trade but which were founded by Barons – Lords who were summoned to Parliament – independently from the Crown (MacKenzie, 1949).

Counties had similarly diverse origins. In England many were based on ancient tribal divisions (Cornwall, Devon and Kent, for example) whereas others had initially been created for military reasons around a town or royal estate. The counties were England's ancient administrative units, within which the landowners were enfranchised. Initially all barons were entitled to attend Parliament, but in 1254 each county was invited to send two representatives who had been elected in the relevant County Court as persons who could speak for their constituents and would deliver local support for the policies agreed in Parliament. Once Wales was united with England by the 1536 Act of Union counties were also created and representatives sent from these to the Parliament in London. Although Scotland had not yet joined with England there were similar processes of delineation being undertaken, first in the lowland areas during the eleventh century and then in the Highlands over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Up until the First Reform Act the majority of county and borough constituencies were undivided (i.e. the county or borough as a whole constituted a single Parliamentary seat and it was not split into sub-divisions)

and returned two members to Parliament. As Birch (1971: 27) notes, initially the role of these individuals was to act as delegates whose assent to the monarch's requests was interpreted as conveying the consent of those they represented. However over time the perceived role of Parliament evolved to the extent that by the nineteenth century two major concepts of political representation had emerged (Birch, 1971: 48). The first was that sovereignty rests with the people, and not with a hereditary ruler, so that power is granted popularly and ultimately belongs to the people; MPs are elected to exercise that power on their behalf. Secondly, MPs are independent makers of national policies, who are empowered to do so by the electoral process. Being a representative democracy, the British Parliament is a representative assembly 'whose power derives its legitimacy from the fact that its members have gone through a process of election, even though they have no obligation to take instructions from their electors' (Birch, 1971: 48).

It was during the nineteenth century that the most significant modifications of the map of Parliamentary constituencies occurred. Following each of the three Reform Acts almost all of the original county and borough seats were sub-divided (and often completely redrawn or further sub-divided), although it is important to note that these changes followed rather than preceded the redistribution of seats. In the case of the Third Reform Act, for instance, Rossiter et al. (1999: 36-7) note that the provisions of the Franchise Bill – one of several that made up the Act – created constituency electorates that were extremely unequal and 'generated widespread realisation of the need for a redistribution'.

During the redistributions of 1832 and 1867 Hundreds were used as the building blocks of the new sub-divided constituencies in the counties. These were sub-divisions of the counties that had first been delineated in the tenth century. Originally they had military, judicial and administrative functions, some of which persisted into the modern period, although as the Boundary Commissions charged with redrawing constituency boundaries in 1884 and 1885 noted, they were not always geographically contiguous territories (Rossiter et al., 1999: 41).¹¹ Because of this these Commissions moved away from using them when drawing up the new constituency boundaries and instead utilised the wards within boroughs and Petty Sessional Divisions in counties to create the new Parliamentary seats.

The Manipulation of Constituency Boundaries

It would be wrong however to assume that the process whereby Parliamentary seats were redistributed and constituency boundaries defined was not manipulated. Rather they were extremely politicised activities, with constituency boundaries drawn up using rules determined by Parliament that were intended to promote the electoral interests of the majority party. During the nineteenth century (and indeed until after 1944) the British electoral system lacked any requirement that the map of Parliamentary constituencies be regularly reviewed to take account of significant changes in the distribution of the population and,

¹¹ Such as in the case of the administration of the Hearth Tax and the maintenance of local militias during the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.

where necessary, redistribute seats or redraw their boundaries to mitigate against the effects of this. As Rossiter et al. (1999: 18) argue, 'thus when redistributions occurred in the nineteenth century, although the decisions on where seats should be allocated were political, and taken by Parliament, the boundaries of the new Borough seats had to be defined by (politically) appointed Boundary Commissioners. The key decisions were, thus, explicitly political, taken by Parliament on recommendations produced by the government – and thus liable for electoral gain'.

Indeed, the work of the Boundary Commissions tended to be constrained by both direct and indirect political influence during each of the three nineteenth century redistributions. In 1832 the redistribution of seats did little to address either the redistribution of the population being caused by the industrial revolution or the consequent over-representation of the counties compared to the boroughs; as Seymour (1915: 45) notes, '[t]he redistribution was certainly tentative and incomplete, leaving the industrial sections of the country inadequately represented ...'. Decisions about which boroughs were to lose representation, and which were to gain it, were intensely political (Rossiter et al., 1999: 23) and it was only after these battles had been fought that Boundary Commissions specially established for the purpose were able to delineate the boundaries of the new constituencies. As Rossiter et al. (1999: 23-5) outline the rules that they were provided with by Parliament limited their ability to produce constituencies with equal electorates. Borough constituencies were expected to conform to at least ten separate requirements while any new sub-divisions of counties had to be achieved without breaking through parishes and hundreds

and, in some cases, communities of interest were to be used as the basis for the division.

Similar issues arose following the implementation of the Second Reform Act. Just one-third of the number seats that had been redistributed in 1832 were reallocated (just 52) from the smallest boroughs to the larger ones or to the counties and new university seats. While this may have been indicative of the traditional interests of Conservatism, the continued survival of a large number of boroughs with small, easily influenced electorates at the expense of granting greater representation to large urban constituencies that were home to most of the new householder voters the Act had created, prevented the reforms of 1867 from being anything like satisfactory on democratic grounds; to have undertaken such a move would likely have been to have advantaged the Liberals (Machin, 2001: 65; Seymour, 1915: 300-10).¹² The need for the new constituency boundaries that resulted from this redistribution was once again delegated to a specially constituted Boundary Commission. Once again this was not politically independent, consisting mainly of Conservative landowners, and in almost one-third of cases the boundaries they recommended for constituencies were modified by a Parliamentary Select Committee established for the express purpose of reviewing these (Rossiter et al., 1999: 31).

After the changes of 1867 the only redistribution before the outbreak of World War One in 1914 took place in 1885. As had been the case with previous

¹² On the other hand Gwyn (1962: 85) argues that the transfer of 700,000 suburb-dwellers from county constituencies to borough constituencies was carried out with the deliberate intention of making the county electorate more Conservative.

Reform Acts, the Third sought to redistribute seats so that Parliamentary representation equated more equally to the distribution of the population. Following this redistribution three Boundary Commissions were once again established – one each for England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland – to undertake the task of demarcating the boundaries of the new constituencies, a process described by Rossiter et al. (1999: 39-44). While both the chair and vice-chair of all three commissions were senior civil servants, and therefore supposedly apolitical, the two other appointees were known partisans – one Liberal, the other Conservative. Their task was to create compact constituencies of relatively equal populations (not electorates – an important distinction) that kept the urban separate from the rural wherever possible and which paid special attention to the ‘pursuits of the population’.

Throughout the nineteenth century, then, there was a persistent inability to create – or perhaps lack of desire for – equal sized constituencies. This was despite a long extra-Parliamentary campaign which called for their instigation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first call was to be found in the seminal reforming pamphlet *Take Your Choice*, published in 1776, the content of which was later to inform the People’s Charter of 1836, a document that provided much of the ideological foundations of the Chartist movement (Machin, 2001: 7). Produced by Major John Cartwright, a member of a Northamptonshire landowning family and one of the earliest members of the landed gentry-class to play a large part in the gradual launching of the Parliamentary Reform movement, the pamphlet called for manhood suffrage, annual Parliaments, the secret ballot and equal electoral districts (Machin, 2001: 7; Eckersley, 2004; Miller: 1968; Osborne, 1972).

An initial attempt to create a legal requirement for equal electoral districts was in 1821, when the government of Lord Grey introduced a reform bill to Parliament but this was ultimately withdrawn (Machin, 2001: 16; see also Brock, 1973: 136-41; Cannon, 1973: 205-10). The final clear demand for equal constituencies was in the Six Points of the People's Charter (since they would 'secure the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of large ones' (Royle, 1996: 91)). Later, as Rossiter et al. (1999: 37-8) record, they were explicitly opposed by Lord Salisbury at the time of the Third Reform Act because,

They proceed exclusively on the system of direct territorial representation, to the exclusion of virtual representation altogether; and I doubt very much whether any mechanism can be found to give anything like an exact copy in Parliament of the wishes of the people which does not make use of the principle of virtual representation. (Salisbury, 1884: 146, cited in Rossiter et al., 1999: 38)

At this time there was also a similar lack of interest in introducing regular reviews of constituency electorates and boundaries; as is clear from above the only occasions in the nineteenth century when these were undertaken was at the time of the three Reform Acts. Although Disraeli recognised the need to address inconsistencies in the distribution of Parliamentary seats, he objected to the instigation of periodic reviews and redistributions because it, 'would afford frequent opportunities for gerrymandering' (Seymour, 1915: 493).

The Impact of Population Change on Electoral Equality

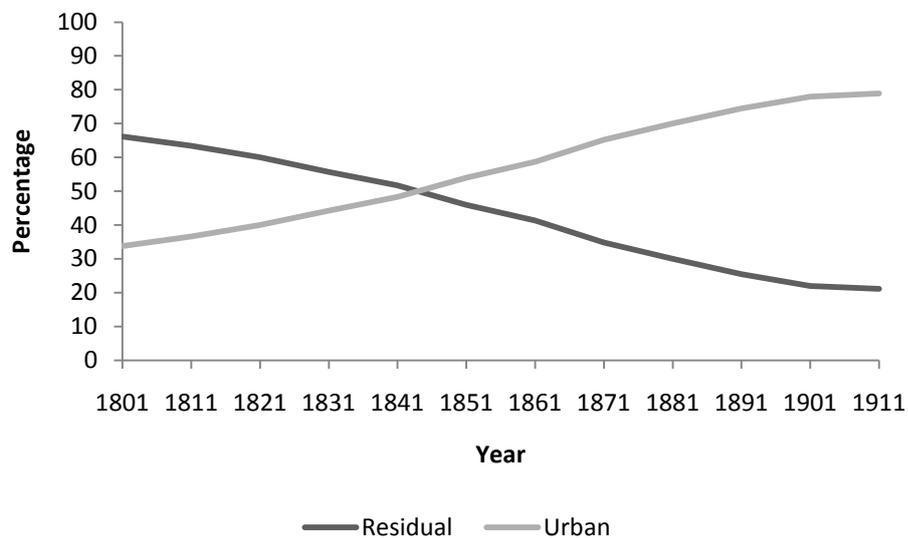
While the constituencies themselves may not have provided the best building blocks to ensure equal electorates, a situation not alleviated by a lack of regular reviews of the equality of constituencies, it was further exacerbated by two other factors: the differential impact of franchise reform on the electorates of different constituency types (as suggested above) and the substantial redistribution of the population over the course of the nineteenth century (and particularly during the period 1851-1901). With respect to the first contributory reason, as Rossiter et al. (1999: 36) note, the provisions of the Third Reform Act that extended the franchise had different outcomes in county and borough constituencies.

Compared with a total increase in the national electorate of 67 per cent, the numbers able to vote in the counties rose by 162 per cent compared with just 11 per cent in the boroughs. With such differences in the numbers enfranchised it was inevitable that the sizes of individual constituency electorates would vary.

A second, more significant contributory factor to the creation of unequal electorates was the differential population growth caused by demographic transition and the movement of labour from rural to urban areas. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Britain changed demographically from being a predominately rural nation to one where the majority of its population were concentrated in urban areas (Figure 5.6). This transition began in the 1830s when a range of factors – including the growing concentration of industrial employment, a reduction in agricultural employment and the greater mobility permitted by the railways – led to a reduction in the rate of population increase in agricultural areas. Rural out-migration was severe and sustained throughout

the period 1851-1901. From the 1840s rural out-migration became prevalent, but was particularly acute throughout the period 1851-1901. There were a variety of reasons for this sustained period of movement. The further decline of employment in the agricultural sector, the movement of craft industries to urban factories and workshops, and the increasing accessibility of the big towns all acted as push factors, while higher wages and more varied job opportunities attracted individuals towards the towns.

Figure 5.6 Urban and rural populations in England and Wales, 1801-1911¹³



Source: Lawton (1990: 313)

As Table 5.2 shows, while there was an absolute movement of people from rural to urban and industrial areas this population transition impacted on different areas of Britain to varying degrees. In general terms there was a redistribution of the population towards a new core of economic and industrial

¹³ The term 'residual' is used by Lawton to refer to anyone who did not reside in an urban area.

areas. The population became increasingly focused on southern Lancashire and west Yorkshire, the Midlands and London, as well as the northeast of England and South Wales. Other areas experienced a relative decline in population, in particular East Anglia and the South West where the persistent decline in rural industries combined with slow urban growth to reduce their share of the national population (Lawton, 1990: 291-4).

Table 5.2. Regional population trends in Great Britain, 1801-1901

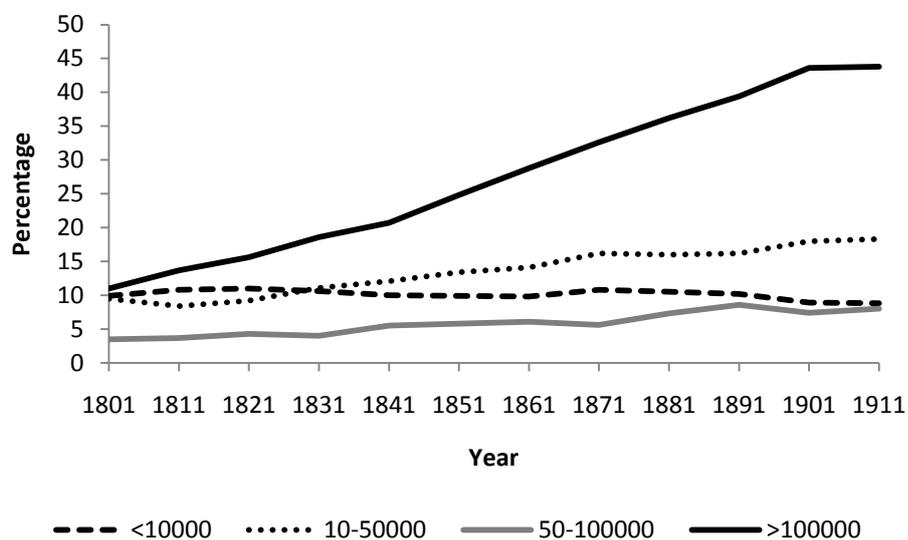
Region	Share of Great Britain (per cent)			Percentage Increase	
	1801	1851	1901	1801-51	1851-1901
ENGLAND	79.1	80.6	82.5	101.9	82.0
South East	23.8	24.3	28.4	104.2	105.9
West Midlands	8.2	8.2	8.1	99.7	74.3
East Midlands	6.1	5.5	5.4	79.9	74.8
East Anglia	6	5	3.1	67.6	7.8
South West	12.8	10.8	6.9	66.9	14.6
Yorkshire/Humberside	7.8	8.7	9.5	121.2	94.4
North West	8.4	12.1	14.3	186.4	109.0
North	6	5.6	6.8	83.3	114.9
WALES	5.6	5.6	5.4	98.0	73.0
SCOTLAND	15.3	13.9	12.1	79.6	54.8

Source: Lawton (1990: 292-3)

The impact of this population transition on the development of urban areas was as significant as its regional geography. The growth in the urban population of Britain was accompanied by the development of much larger cities (Figure 5.7). Mitchell (1962: Table 8) notes that in 1831 other than London, just five other cities had populations that exceeded 100,000 (Manchester, Liverpool,

Birmingham, Leeds and Bristol). Over the course of the century the number of cities with populations of 100,000 or less remained fairly constant, but the share of the population in the largest cities grew enormously, reaching a little under 45 per cent in 1911. By this date over half of the urban population was located in 36 large towns, headed by London (Coppock, 1973: 655).

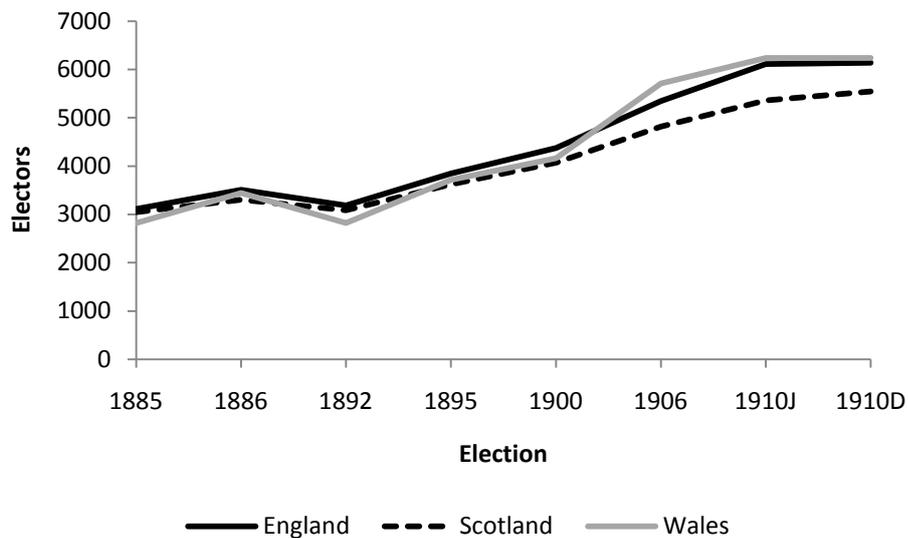
Figure 5.7 Urban population of England and Wales according to settlement size, 1801-1911



Source: Lawton (1990: 313)

Because of these patterns of population change, and without regular reviews of their boundaries, the electorates of the constituencies established by the Third Reform Act became more unequal, varying in size, over the ensuing 25 year period – something that is termed creeping malapportionment. This is illustrated by Figure 5.8, which shows the standard deviation around the mean electorate at each of the general elections between 1885 and December

Figure 5.8 Standard deviation in electorate size for English, Scottish and Welsh constituencies, 1885-December 1910



Source: Constituency Results Database

1910.¹⁴ The standard deviation in all of the constituent nations of Britain was about 3,000 voters at the first contest in this sequence and remained at a fairly similar level in 1866 and 1892. From 1895 onwards it became progressively larger, increasing by about 500 voters in 1895 and again in 1900. The greatest increases came at the last three general elections of the period, with the result that by December 1910 the standard deviation was twice as large as it had been in 1885. Until the general election of 1900 there was little difference in the trend between England, Scotland and Wales, despite constituencies in the latter two countries being smaller than they were in England. Welsh constituencies displayed a larger deviation from the mean than their English counterparts from

¹⁴ Standard deviation is a measure of the 'spread' of values in a distribution.

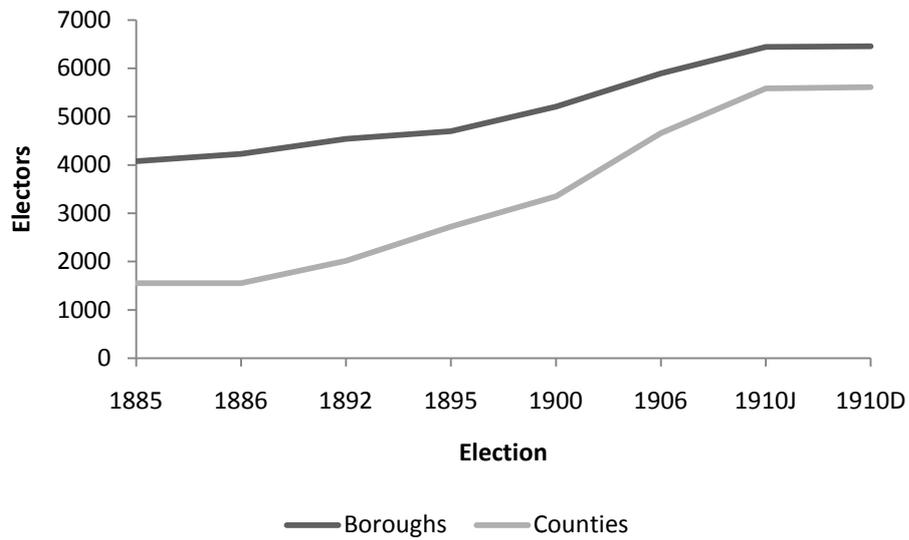
The greater the standard deviation the larger the disparity is between the minimum and maximum values in the distribution.

1906 onwards, having been smaller up until then, while those in Scotland lagged some 500 to 800 voters behind.

These national trends hide significant differences between the electorate sizes of county and borough constituencies within each of the three countries. In England borough constituencies had a higher standard deviation than their county counterparts (Figure 5.9). In 1885, this was approximately 4,000 voters compared to around 1,700, although over the next seven contests the disparity in county electorates grew significantly to almost 5,000. The deviation in borough electorate sizes grew more slowly over the same period to just over 6,000 voters, with the consequence that the gap between the two constituency types narrowed. Scotland and Wales followed a similar upward trend to England (Figure 5.10), with the notable exception of the Scottish boroughs where the standard deviation rose only slightly over the period. Whereas in Scotland the two constituency types were closely matched in terms of electorate size, there was a substantial difference in Wales where the disparity between borough and county constituencies was around 4,000 electors at every election between 1885 and December 1910. Although the county seats where the Conservatives attracted significant electoral support tended to be smaller, reducing the number of effective votes they required to win, the smaller size of constituencies in Scotland and Wales may also explain why the Liberals were sometimes favoured by this element of the malapportionment component. In general then, it is clear that constituency sizes became increasingly unequal between 1885 and December 1910.

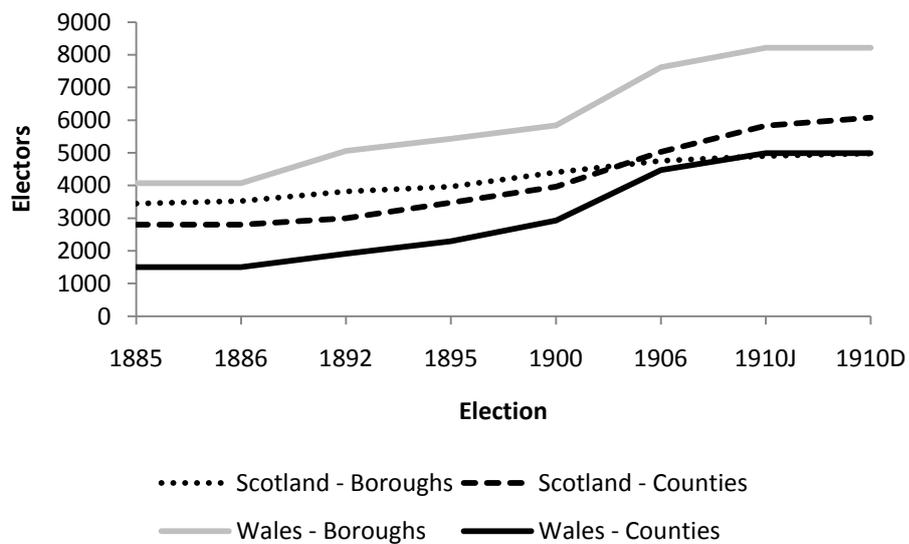
The impact that the failure to regularly review these had on the size of electorates is underlined by Figure 5.11. This shows the percentage of all

Figure 5.9 Standard deviations in electorate size by constituency type for England, 1885-December 1910



Source: Constituency Results Database

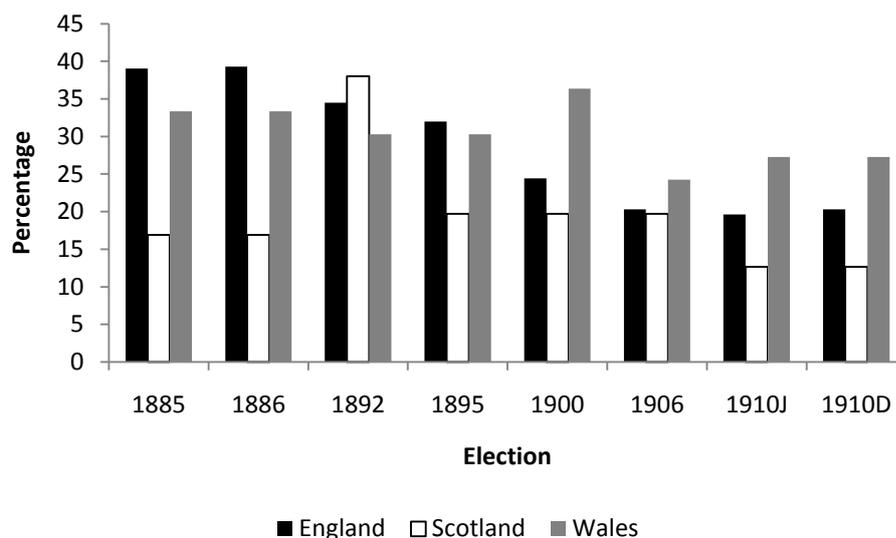
Figure 5.10 Standard deviations in electorate size by constituency type for Scotland and Wales, 1885-December 1910



Source: Constituency Results Database

constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales that were within ten percentage points of the mean electorate size. Across Britain as a whole the number that were declined substantially over the course of the eight general elections, reflecting an increasing instability in the size of constituency electorates. In England the number within ten percentage points of the mean fell from just under 40 per cent at the former to 20 per cent at the latter. Scotland also saw a decline across the same period, although not to the same extent and only after an increase in its percentage between 1892 and 1906. The situation in Wales was much more fluid, with falls in its share of constituencies within ten percentage points of the mean in 1892 and 1906 and increases in 1900 and January 1910, as well as some elections where it remained the same.

Figure 5.11 Percentage of constituency electorates within ten percentage points of the national average at each general election, 1885-December 1910

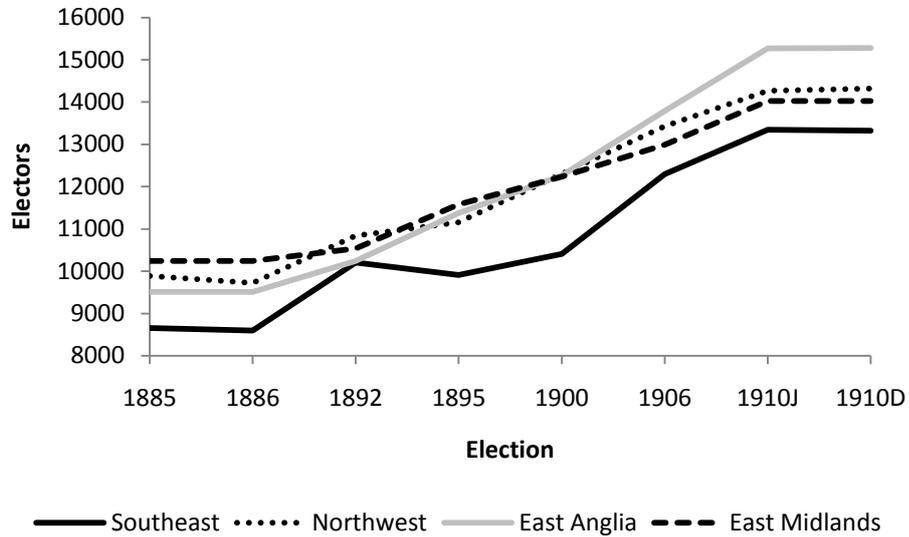


Source: Constituency Results Database

Why was the bias shown in Figure 5.5 so uneven in who it favoured? On the one hand, it favoured the Conservatives because they generally tended to be most successful in areas with smaller constituency sizes, thus needing fewer votes to win their seats. This was played out, as would be expected, with a distinctly regional dimension. Although the size of all constituencies grew at a similar rate over the period after the Third Reform Act (Figure 5.12), regions such as the South East (a Tory stronghold) continued to be divided into Parliamentary seats with smaller electorates than in areas such as East Anglia which were more mixed in their party allegiances. Taken together Figures 5.12 (which shows this trend for the South East especially) and 5.13, which depicts the ratio of Conservative to Liberal votes at each election in each of the four regions, underline this trend.¹⁵ From this it appears that the relationship between the number of votes cast and constituency size at a regional level is significant. Although the Liberals were more successful in the East Midlands, East Anglia and the North West they had to work harder than the Conservatives who needed to win fewer votes in the South East in order to translate them into seats. It was the Liberals' misfortune to be strongest in areas where the constituencies were larger. The uneven trend in these results generally, however, can be explained by the fact that the Liberals' support was spread across more regions, giving them an *overall* advantage in the electoral system. Both parties were favoured and penalised by the electoral system, just in different ways.

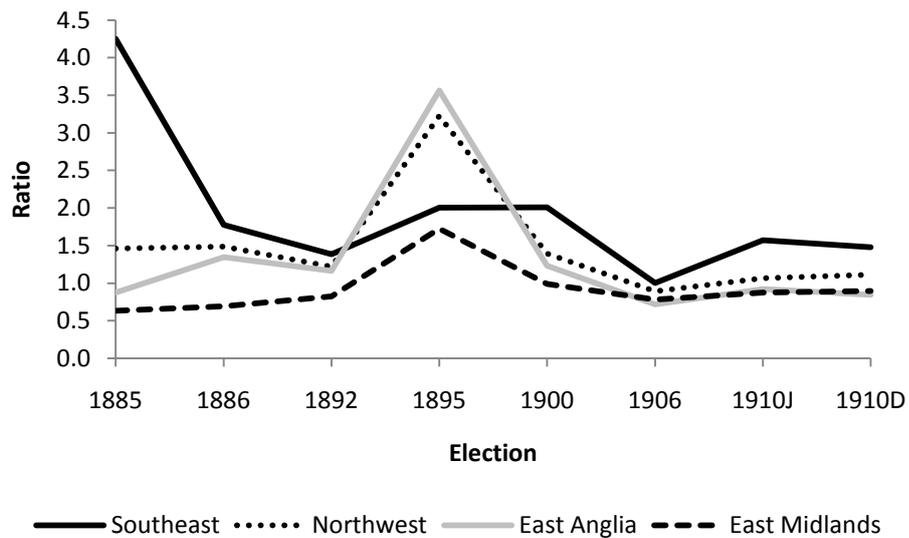
¹⁵ In Figure 5.13 a ratio greater than 1 indicates that the Conservatives were the largest party whereas one of less than 1 indicates that the Liberals outpolled them.

Figure 5.12 Average electorates in the South East, North West, East Anglia and East Midlands regions, 1885-December 1910



Source: Constituency Results Database

Figure 5.13 The ratio of Conservative to Liberal votes in the South East, North West, East Anglia and East Midlands regions, 1885-December 1910



Source: Constituency Results Database

Summary

This chapter has focused on the impact of differences in constituency sizes, something that can occur at two scales: the national (through what are termed national electoral quotas) and within countries because of a failure to keep pace with changes to the geography of population. When the support for a party is concentrated in areas or Parliamentary seats where electorates are smaller, a situation that can either be deliberately created or which arises incidentally between reviews of constituency boundaries, then the result will be a bias its favour.

Unequal constituency sizes were common in nineteenth-century Britain. At a national level this was because each constituent nation (England, Scotland and Wales) was guaranteed either formally – through the various Acts of Union – or informally – because of a customary right – a specific number of seats in the House of Commons. This was independent of the number of electors in each nation, a factor which meant that the average constituency size varied between nations. The product of this was a small bias in favour of the Liberals in the national electoral quotas component of the malapportionment electorate, something that was the result of the relative strength of the party in both Scotland and Wales where the average electorate was smaller than in England.

On an intra-national level, variations in constituency sizes resulted from a large scale change in the distribution of the population during the nineteenth century. Over this time Britain changed from being a mainly rural nation to one where the majority of its population resided in large towns and cities. The map of Parliamentary constituencies failed to keep pace with this change, however,

with many of the new centres of population such as the industrial boroughs of the north and the suburban areas around many of the expanded cities remaining under-represented until after the implementation of the redistribution elements of the Third Reform Act. Although there were provisions in the rules of each of the Boundary Commissions that were established after each Reform Act specifically to delineate the new boundaries of the new constituencies, they operated using the principle (among others) that they should be of equal population rather than electorate. The result of this was that while the gap between the electorate of the largest and the smallest Parliamentary seat fell, there were still substantial differences between county and borough constituencies and among different areas of Britain.

Political expediency also played a substantial role in the failure to combat disparities in electorate sizes. None of the Boundary Commissions of the nineteenth century were truly independent – all had a partisan element to their membership, although to varying degrees, and each drew up constituency boundaries according to rules determined by Parliament itself. The end result of the process that followed the Third Reform Act was a set of constituencies of varying sizes, especially in England and Wales. Because the constituency boundaries implemented in 1885 continued in use at the next seven general elections over 25 years, without any review of their representativeness, these disparities were maintained and in some case increased. The result of this was a fluctuating bias due to constituency size variations over the period between 1885 and December 1910, sometimes favouring the Conservatives and at other elections the Liberals; this was larger in size than the bias resulting from national electoral quotas.

In general, then, Parliamentary constituencies in the nineteenth century varied in size and this had important consequences for the two main parties. The next chapter moves on to consider a second electoral geography, the spatial distribution of the vote and how this interacted with the map of constituencies described in this chapter.

Chapter 6

The Efficiency of Vote Distributions

As discussed in chapters four and five, the bias in the nineteenth-century electoral system can be attributed to several factors. This chapter focuses on the second source of bias – one which is derived from the geography of support for the various political parties. Differences in the relative efficiency of the geography of support for each of the two main political parties produced an effect that was the equivalent of gerrymandering – a strategy defined by Johnston et al. (2001b: 129) as ‘the drawing of constituency boundaries by politically motivated groups in order to promote their electoral interests’. The overall aim of employing this strategy is to make sure that as many electoral districts as possible have a majority of votes for a particular party (Johnston et al., 2001b: 43).¹ During the nineteenth century there was no opportunity to

¹ The deliberate determination of constituency boundaries has been actively practised in the United States since 1812 when Governor Eldridge Gerry of Massachusetts drew boundaries for electoral districts in the state so as to maximise the chance of his party’s winning seats. In a contemporary comment on this cartographic abuse the cartoonist Elkanah Tisdale superimposed the head and tail of a salamander on a map showing some of Gerry’s long, thin and tortuously constructed districts – hence the origins of the term gerrymandering to describe attempts to deliberately influence the frequency distribution of party support across the map of constituencies. The process of gerrymandering and

'classically' gerrymander because no political party had direct control over the process of constituency definition. Instead, as chapter four discussed, the equivalent of gerrymandering occurred as a result of the different geographies of support for the political parties. At each general election from 1885 onwards one party benefited over the other because its votes were more efficiently distributed across the constituencies than its opponent's.

Figure 6.1 Bias due to the gerrymander component, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

An analysis of the election results contained in the Constituency Elections Database indicates that at all but one election the Liberals were this party. The extent to which they gained from the geographical distribution of their support is detailed in Figure 6.1, which shows the trend in the gerrymander, or efficiency, component of the bias measure when both of the parties have an equal share of its consequences remain a part of the electoral landscape in the United States today.

the vote. At the beginning of the post-Third Reform Act period the Liberal advantage was small, just five seats, and this was reversed seven months later at the 1886 general election in favour of the Conservatives. The pro-Conservative bias of 15 at this contest was the only such advantage of the entire period since at each of the next six contests the direction of the bias shifted in favour of the Liberals once again. During this spell the pro-Liberal bias ranged between 21 (in 1895) and 101 (in 1906) seats, with particularly large increases at the elections of 1892 and 1906 and relative declines in 1895 and again in January 1910.

This chapter examines why this came about. It looks first at the frequency distributions of the Liberal share of the two party (Liberal plus Conservative) vote at each election between 1885 and December 1910 before moving on to consider the implications of this in terms of effective, surplus and wasted votes. It concludes by considering the reasons why the geography of the Liberal vote was similar to one that a gerrymandered electoral system would have produced.

The Distribution of the Liberal Vote, 1885-December 1910

As suggested earlier, in the absence of any deliberate strategy of gerrymandering, the clear implication of the trend in this bias component is that after some fluctuation at the 1885 and 1886 general elections the distribution of the vote across the Parliamentary constituencies developed into one which favoured the Liberal party and its candidates, thus boosting their electoral fortunes. This is underlined by Figure 6.2, which depicts the Liberal share of the two party (Liberal plus Conservative) vote at each of the eight general elections

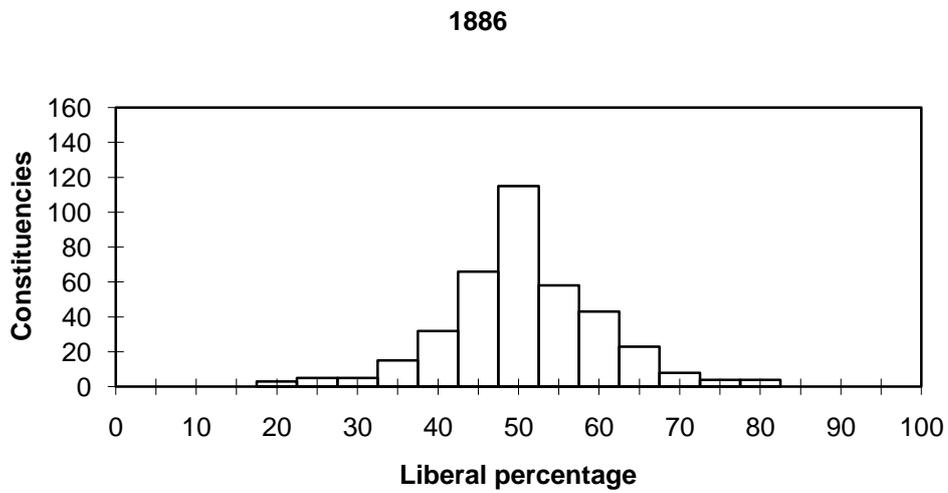
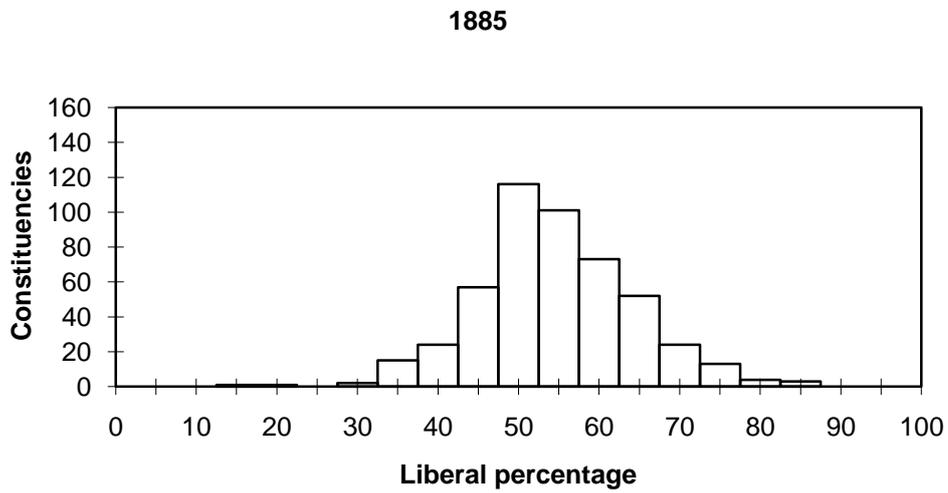
between 1885 and December 1910. Only seats won by either of these parties in a contested constituency are included, meaning that the small numbers of third-party victories are excluded along with all uncontested constituencies. Within each of the eight frequency distributions there are two key characteristics that relate to the electoral success of the Liberals: the amount of skew and the degree of kurtosis. Skewness is a measure of the degree of asymmetry around the modal value of the distribution, while the degree of kurtosis is a measure of the 'peakedness' of the distribution.

As Johnston et al. (2002b: 338) note,

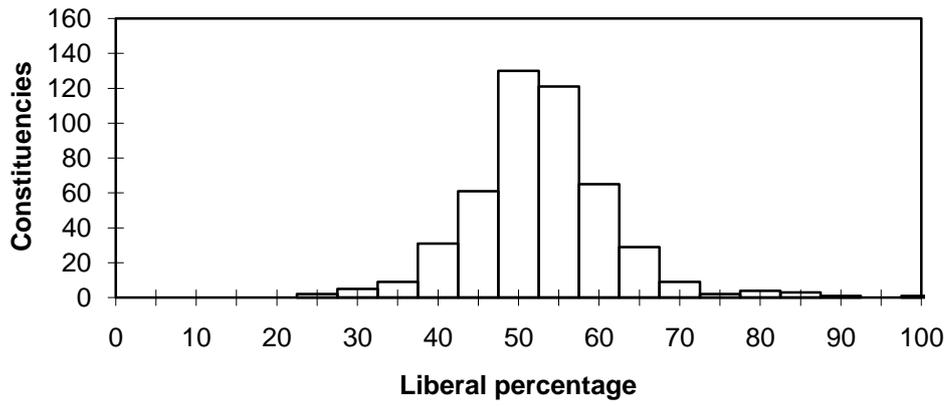
[t]he ideal situation for a political party contesting a general election is that every vote it attracts should count in terms of winning seats: none are wasted. Votes cast for it in seats that it loses are ineffective, as are those in excess of the number of needed for victory in seats that it wins.

Therefore, for any party the optimum distribution of votes across a map of constituencies would result in a frequency distribution which is both positively (i.e. right-) skewed and very 'peaky' (or highly leptokurtic) compared to a traditional bell-shaped normal curve. This would mean that it had won the majority of its seats with shares of the two-party vote that would be clustered closely around the mode, reflecting the fact that most victories were achieved with very small majorities, whilst accumulating few surplus or wasted votes. A lower degree of kurtosis (a flatter or platykurtic distribution) with a smaller peak around the modal value would result if the party's vote was more varied across the map of constituencies. In this case the party would win or lose the seats it was contesting by varying amounts, some by large margins and others by only a small number of votes. Similarly, any distribution that displayed a negative

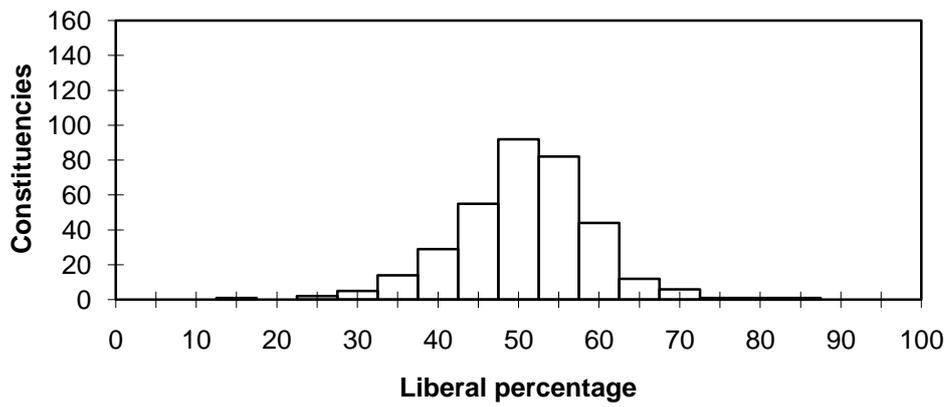
Figure 6.2 Frequency distributions of the Liberal percentage of the two party (Liberal + Conservative) vote, 1885-December 1910



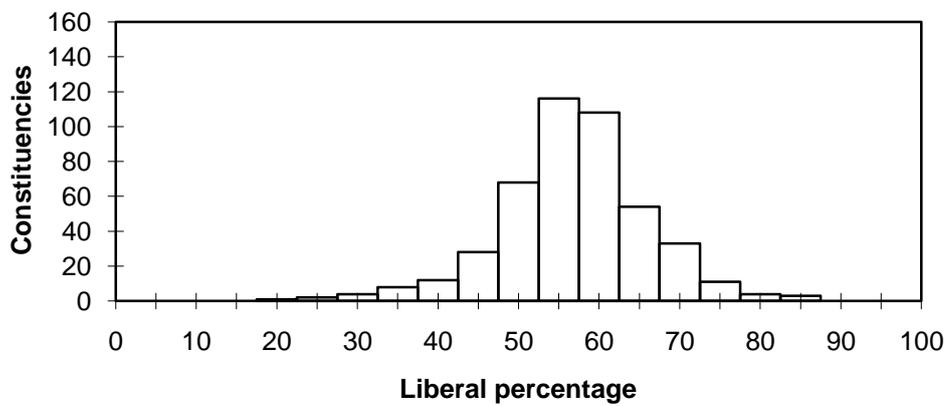
1892



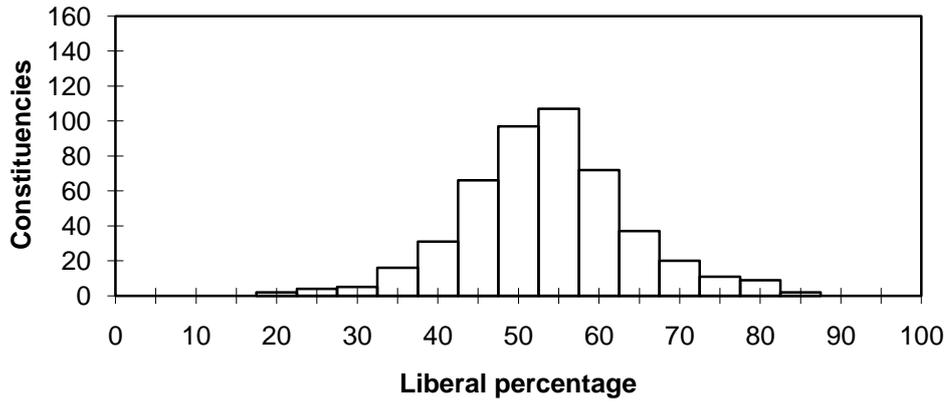
1900



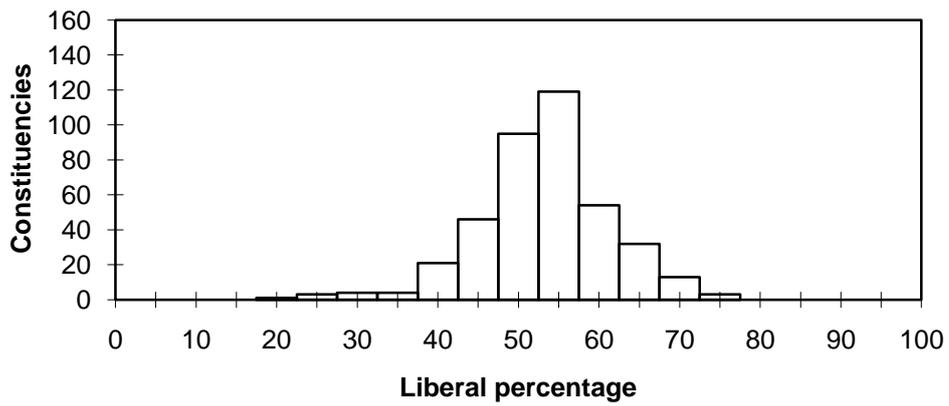
1906



January 1910



December 1910



(i.e. left-) skew would result from a party losing a majority of the seats it was contesting. Overall, then, in the case of Figure 6.2 a positively skewed distribution favours the Liberals and a negatively skewed one the Conservatives.

Each of the frequency distributions in Figure 6.2, with the notable exception of the one for the 1886 general election, is positively skewed although there are varying degrees of kurtosis. In 1885 the right-skew is counterbalanced by a relatively platykurtic distribution, indicating that the Liberals had many safe seats with large majorities and relatively large numbers of surplus votes compared with the Conservatives. The small pro-Conservative bias of 1886 – the only one of the period between the Third Reform Act and World War One – can be explained by the slight negative skew of the distribution in that year. While the Liberals were still winning seats, and again accumulating relatively large numbers of surplus votes, Conservative candidates were also winning seats although in a much more effective manner: by very small majorities. The distribution of the Liberal vote in 1892 reverted to a pattern similar to that in 1885, although this time the right-skew was more ‘peaky’, indicating that fewer seats were won by running up large majorities. This distribution of votes was more efficient, as indicated in Figure 6.1 by an increase in the pro-Liberal bias at this election. While the 1895 and 1900 general elections displayed only a slight positive skew, a pronounced change occurred in 1906. At this contest, and those of January and December 1910, there was a very definite tendency for the Liberal vote distribution to display a right-skew as well as a trend towards increasing ‘peakiness’. This period saw the creation of a large number of marginal constituencies, seats where a small shift in support meant that they

could easily change hands, as well as a decline in the number of safe Liberal seats. This trend meant that the Liberal 'party' was no longer disadvantaged by large numbers of surplus votes in seats it won and by wasted votes in those it lost and accounts for the substantial increase in the pro-Liberal efficiency bias.

Wasted, Surplus and Effective Votes

The patterns displayed in these distributions become much clearer if the focus is shifted to the effective, surplus and wasted votes accrued by the Conservative and the Liberal parties. These three types of vote reveal some key differences between the two parties with respect to how well their votes 'worked' for them. Effective votes are those needed to win in a constituency – the total number of votes obtained by the second-placed party plus one. In contrast, surplus votes bring no return to the party they are cast for since they are those votes cast in a constituency where a party's candidate wins but by more votes than were necessary to defeat the second-placed candidate (thus they are the number of votes cast for the victor minus the votes of the second-placed candidate). Finally, wasted votes are those which bring no return because they are cast in constituencies where the party's candidate loses.² These three types

² This scenario is based on a seat where there are only two parties competing. However, depending on the number of parties contesting a constituency and the distribution of votes the effective number of votes may be less than half of the total number cast, plus one. For example, in a constituency where one hundred votes are cast and there are three competing parties, the effective number of votes could range between 50 (if the winning party obtained 50 votes, the

of votes can be illustrated through the results of the Scottish county constituency of Aberdeen North at the 1885 general election, when the victorious Liberal candidate won 4,794 votes, the second-placed Conservative 894 and the Independent Liberal candidate, in third place, 177.³ Of all the votes cast for the Liberal candidate in the constituency only 895 were effective (the number of votes won by the second-placed candidate plus one), 3,899 were surplus to requirements because they brought with them no additional seats, and 1,071 were wasted. In this case, therefore, only 18.7 per cent of all the votes cast for the Liberal candidate were effective, 30.5 per cent were 'active' in the sense that they played some role in deciding the election as did just 21.7 per cent of the total electorate.

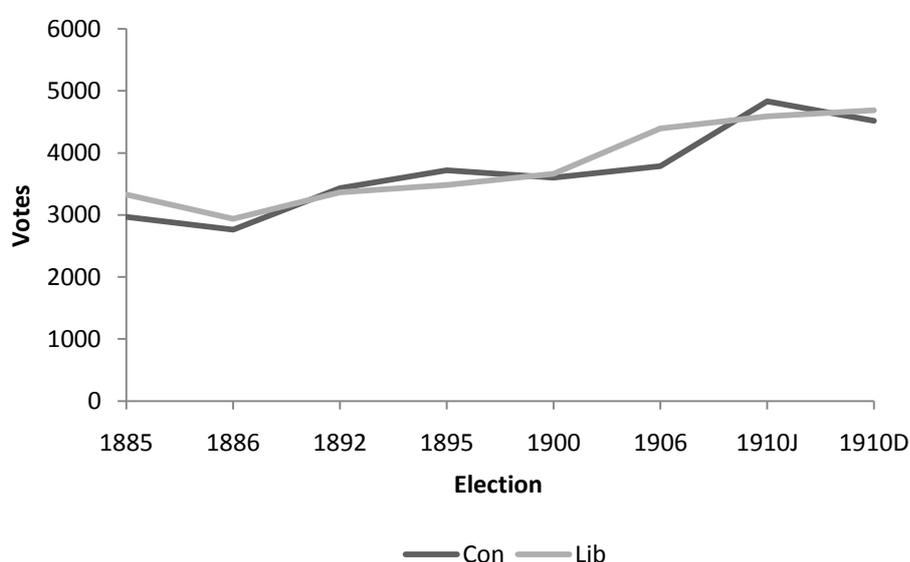
Figures 6.3-6.6 show the trends in wasted, surplus and effective votes (with equal vote shares) for the Conservative and Liberal parties over the eight general elections between 1885 and December 1910. Because the bias measure reflects a situation where the two parties have equal shares of the votes the three types of vote are slightly different from those outlined above. If a party obtains a large number of surplus votes in the seats it wins, this is the result of victories in seats by substantial margins that have brought no more return than if the same victories were achieved by smaller margins. In the same way, if a party wastes a significant number of votes in the seats it loses then although it is performing well in terms of making a showing it is still not doing

second-placed party 49 and the third 1) and 34 (if two of the parties received 33 votes each) (Johnston et al., 2001b: 19).

³ The first contested Parliamentary seat in Britain when all constituencies are placed in alphabetical order.

well enough to win and would still lose with fewer votes. Finally, if the number of effective votes per seat won is less for one party than its opponents then it is winning constituencies where the second-placed party is relatively weak, meaning that victory is relatively easy to achieve (Johnston et al., 2001b: 14).

Figure 6.3 Effective votes per seat won for the Conservative and Liberal parties at general elections 1885-December 1910, with equal vote shares

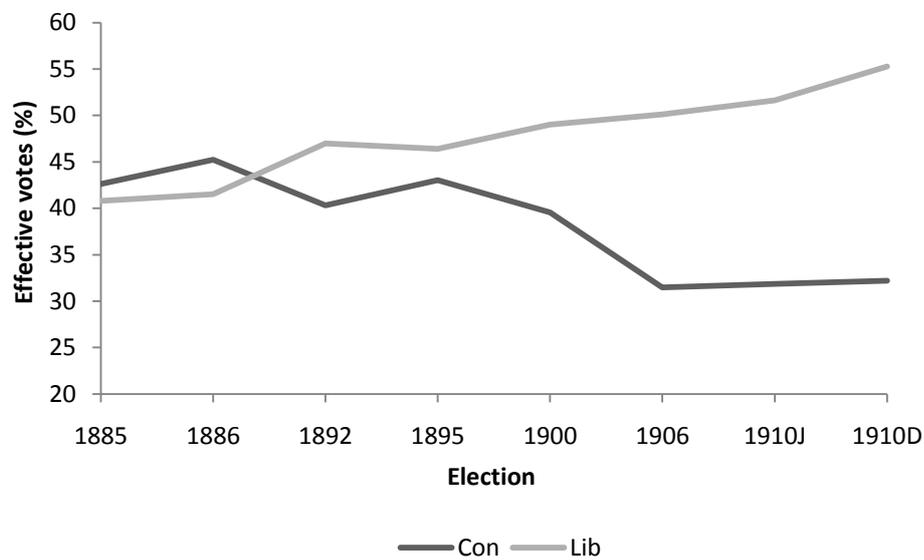


Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Looking first at effective votes (Figure 6.3), there was little difference between the two parties throughout the period. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives required very similar numbers of votes to win a seat at each of the eight elections, although this did increase over the period, just as the electorate itself was growing, from around 3,000 in 1885 to a little over 4,500 by December 1910. It was not always the case that the party which was favoured by the efficiency bias measure was the one that needed the fewest effective votes. In

1886, for example, when there was a pro-Conservative bias the Liberals required a larger number of effective votes, as would be expected, but in 1906 when there was a substantial bias in favour of the former they also needed more effective votes than their rivals to win a seat.

Figure 6.4 Percentage of all votes that were effective for the Conservative and Liberal parties, 1885-December 1910, with equal vote shares

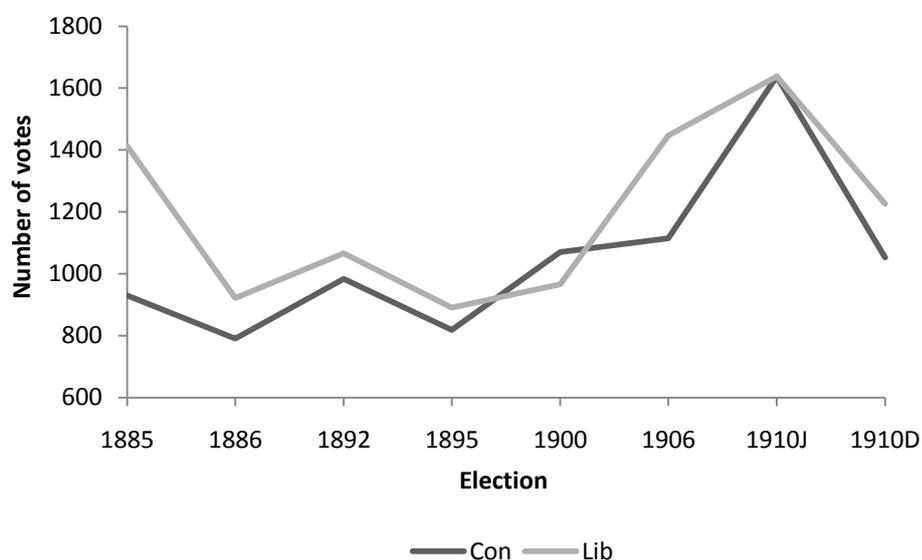


Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 6.4 also looks at each party's effective votes but shows them as a percentage of all the votes that they received. Here a key difference emerges between the Conservatives and the Liberals. After an initial period during which the two parties had broadly similar percentage shares of effective votes, the two diverged after 1886. At the general elections of both 1885 and 1886 between 40 and 45 per cent of the vote for both the Conservative and Liberal parties was effective. Although the gap between the Conservatives and Liberals widened in 1886 in favour of the former, the situation then reversed permanently. In 1892,

1896 and 1900 the gap between the two parties was within a band of 5 to 10 percentage points, with a little under 50 per cent of all votes cast for the Liberals being effective. The general election of 1906 was a real turning point for both parties, however, as the gap between the two opened up substantially; over the remaining three contests of the period the percentage of all Liberal votes that were effective climbed towards 55 per cent while the Conservative percentage fell away to a little over 30 per cent. In sum, while the actual number of effective votes required to win a seat remained almost identical for the two parties, after 1886 the Liberals were increasingly able to make a larger proportion of all the votes they received effective compared to the Conservatives.

Figure 6.5 Average surplus votes per seat won for Conservative and Liberal parties, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910



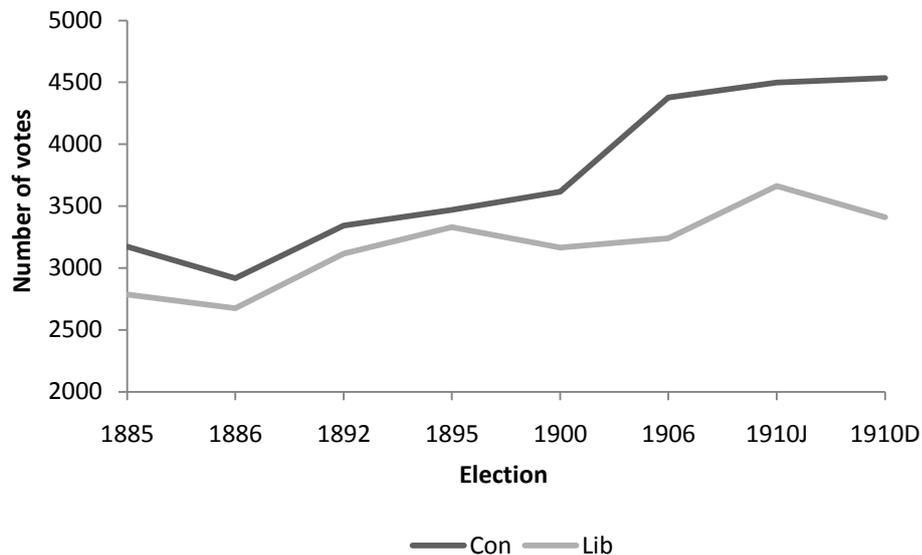
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

If the percentage of votes that were effective varied between parties, it is also important to look at surplus votes. Figure 6.5 shows how the number of surplus

votes per seat won broadly increased over the eight general elections for both parties. At every one other than 1900, Liberal candidates accumulated more surplus votes than their Conservative counterparts when winning a seat, indicative of a number of victories by margins that were larger than necessary. At most elections the difference between the two parties was very small, indeed in January 1910 victories were achieved by the two main parties with virtually identical quantities of surplus votes, with these accounting for only a few hundred of all the votes cast in a constituency. After 1895 a party tended to win a seat with considerably more surplus votes than it had at the first four electoral contests of the period.

Finally, Figure 6.6 shows that throughout the twenty-five year period the Conservatives wasted many more votes for each seat they lost than the Liberals did. Until 1895 there was little difference between the two parties, but from 1900 – and 1906 in particular – onwards the gap between the two opened up significantly. From 1906 the number of votes being wasted by Conservative and Liberal candidates remained fairly steady at around 4,500 per seat lost for the former and around 3,000-3,500 for the latter. This trend is indicative of the impact of the tendency shown in Figure 6.4. In general Conservative candidates tended to lose seats by a much larger amount of votes than their Liberal counterparts did. Because they performed better when coming second in comparison to the Liberals, the Conservatives accrued more wasted votes. Ultimately it was better to lose badly, and not waste votes, than come close to winning a seat but fail to do so.

Figure 6.6 Average wasted votes per seat lost for the Conservative and Liberal parties, 1885-December 1910, with equal vote shares



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Explaining the Liberal Vote Distribution

In the absence of a strategy of deliberate gerrymandering the question remains as to why the Liberal vote was distributed so efficiently. Johnston et al. (2002b: 357), in their analysis of the transformation of the Labour vote distribution from an inefficient to an efficient one between 1950 and 2001, outline four possible explanations for the change: that the geographies of support for the two main political parties benefitted one more than the other; gerrymandering of constituency boundaries, either deliberately or as a by-product of changes in the non-partisan rules operated by the Boundary Commissions; focused constituency campaigns so that a party increasingly wins votes where they can be translated into seats; and, finally, because of tactical voting amongst the electorate to the detriment of one particular party.

In the case of the post-third Reform Act period two of these explanations can be discounted. The first is tactical voting, a scenario where the primary aim of voters is to unseat the incumbent. As Johnston et al. (2002b: 358) state, '[I]ndividuals vote for the second choice party, because it has a greater chance of victory in their constituency over their third choice than does their most-favoured party'. With virtually all constituencies being contested by just two candidates during this period, usually representing the two main parties, there was very little opportunity for individuals to vote tactically. Also there was little opportunity for constituency boundaries to be gerrymandered during this period since the last redistribution of Parliamentary seats was in 1884, before this series of elections began.

Three other reasons remain, however, and each could have influenced the frequency distribution of the Liberal vote. The first of these is the overall geography of support for the two parties, which as the first two chapters argued saw a gradual evolution over the course of the later nineteenth century. Conventionally it is assumed that the strength of the Conservatives during the nineteenth century lay in two particular areas: the smaller boroughs and in rural counties of England. Both were areas where the party could exploit the traditional deferential links between the patron landowner, key local individuals and the tenant elector. In contrast, the Liberals are seen as a party that relied upon urban areas, particularly the larger, newly industrialised areas, for their support because of the influence that could be exerted by local employers on their workforces. Additionally, the anti-landlord tendencies of Scottish and Welsh county politics allowed the Liberals to exploit the vacuum created by the inability of landowners to exercise political control as they did in England.

However, as chapter two outlined, these generalisations tend to hide some important changes in the geography of support for the two parties. In 1885 support for the Liberals was fairly widespread and could be found particularly in the East Midlands, the North and Yorkshire in England, as well as across Scotland and Wales. Electoral support for the Conservatives was much more concentrated and was to be found mainly in new industrial areas such as the North West and West Midlands of England and, more traditionally, in the South East. By December 1910 the map of support for the two parties had been redrawn, with the Liberals retreating towards the peripheries of Britain and the development of a clear north-south divide in support between themselves and the Conservatives. The Conservatives had by then become the leading party (in terms of vote share) in the South Midlands and South West of England, whilst also increasing their share of the vote substantially in traditionally Liberal-leaning areas such as the East Midlands, the North and Yorkshire.

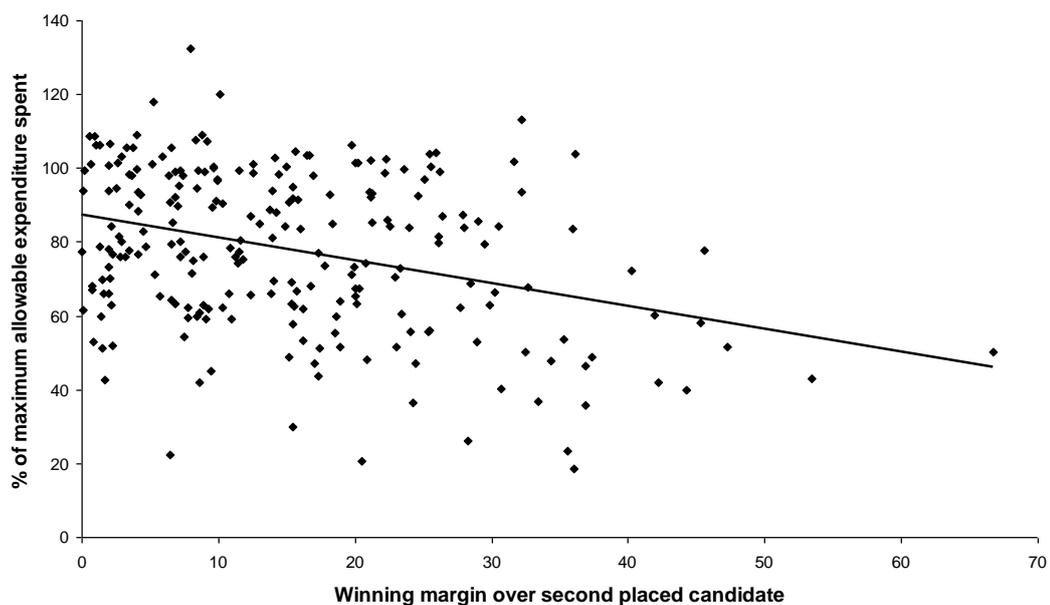
Despite these changes the overall distribution of the vote continued to favour the Liberals because electoral support for the Conservatives became more geographically dispersed and did so in a way that failed to translate into Parliamentary seats. In areas such as the South West and the South Midlands, the latter frequently won Parliamentary constituencies by large margins. Following the redistribution of 1884, however, these regions contained fewer Parliamentary constituencies than areas such as the North West and Yorkshire, which had seen their increased importance and population following industrialisation rewarded through the allocation of additional seats. In addition, their electorates were typically much smaller than in their more industrial counterparts. Doing well in these regions brought little reward, however. Fewer

effective votes were required to win a seat because of a lack of credible Liberal competition and surplus votes were accumulated when victories were achieved by a large majority as a result. However, despite these advantages there were fewer seats to be won and by failing to produce a credible showing the Liberals benefitted from not accumulating a large number of wasted votes. At the same time the Conservatives were handicapped by making inroads into traditionally Liberal areas, such as the northern cities where there were large numbers of seats they could win. Here the party was performing well by the general election of December 1910 but not necessarily well enough to win and it was this fact that handicapped them. By not doing so the Conservatives accumulated a large amount of wasted votes in each constituency where they ran the Liberals close but ultimately failed to win. At the same time this increased the number of Liberal votes that were effective and drove down the amount that were surplus.

The benefit that the Liberals derived from having a more concentrated geography of support was enhanced by the second possible influence: the development of a more targeted approach to constituency campaigns which enhanced the efficiency of their vote distributions. While the consensus has been that the development of focused party campaigns in Britain was a post-World War Two development, there is strong evidence from official expenditure returns in Parliamentary Papers to show that there was a transformation in campaign spending during the later nineteenth century. This development was accompanied by an increasingly rational distribution of local campaigning efforts, a trend that can be mapped by using campaign expenditure as a surrogate measure of campaign intensity (Pattie and Johnston, 1996). Prior to 1883 candidates spent near to, and in some cases in excess of, the maximum

allowable amount in almost all constituencies. Often this was regardless of the popular vote margin between those standing and their chances of winning; in many cases this can be attributed to the expectation that parties would make a showing in all constituencies, regardless of their chance of winning.

Figure 6.7 Relationship between campaign intensity and expenditure, 1892



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database and Election Expenditure Database

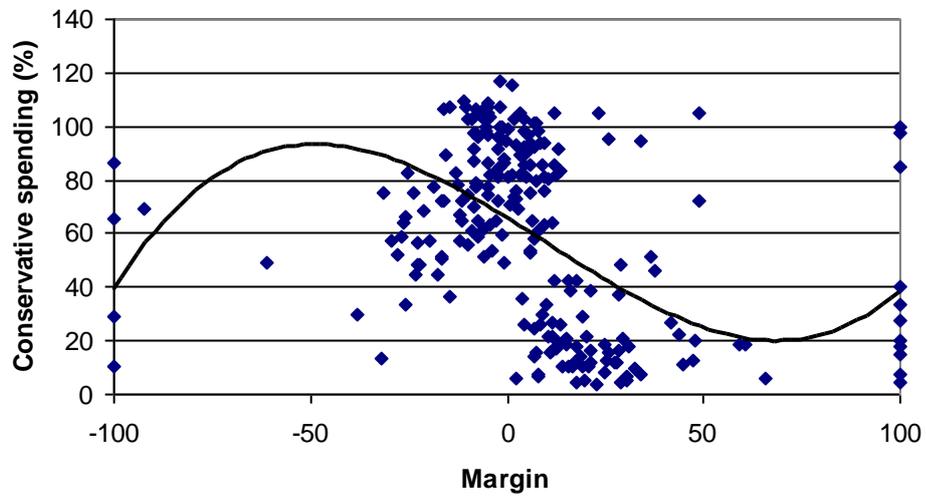
During the 1885 general election and the three subsequent ones, however, candidates spent only between 75 and 85 per cent of the maximum allowed on average during their campaigns, underscoring a move towards a move towards an increasingly strategic local campaign effort. Figure 6.7 shows the relationship between campaign intensity and expenditure in each of the county constituencies in England and Wales at the 1892 general election. Typical of other electoral contests between 1885 and 1895, it demonstrates the extent to

which the vigour of the contest determined the amount spent trying to win it: the closer the contest, the greater the campaign funds spent.

Within this general pattern, however, there were important variations between Conservative and Liberal candidates. It would be expected that campaign funds would be directed to, firstly, those seats that the incumbent wished to retain, and secondly, those where the margin of victory at the previous election was small. As a result, sitting candidates should spend more defending marginal seats than safe seats and, similarly, challengers should spend most where they had a chance of winning (Johnston et al., 1999a: 394). Figures 6.8 and 6.9 show the amount spent by Conservative and Liberal candidates respectively according to competitive situation at the 1895 general election. In each, 'margin' is the measured in percentage points: if the party held the seats at the previous general election in 1892, it is the difference between its percentage of the vote and that of the second-placed party, and is a positive number; if the party did not hold the seat, it is the difference between its percentage of the vote and that of the incumbent party, and is therefore a negative number.

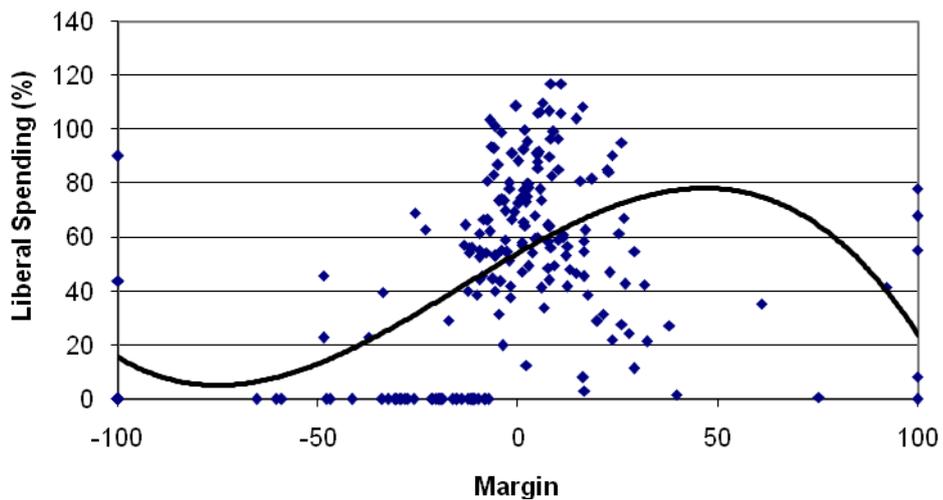
The two show contrasting geographies of campaigning in individual constituencies. Typically, Liberal candidates expended little effort in trying to win seats that were heavily Conservative, but up to 60 per cent of the maximum amount allowed in marginal Conservative seats. More significant efforts were made to defend seats in which Liberal members were the incumbents, where candidates spent up to 80 per cent of the maximum scale allowed by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act. Contrastingly, Conservative candidates expended

Figure 6.8 The relationship between Conservative candidate spending and vote margins at the 1895 general election



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database and Election Expenditure Database

Figure 6.9 The relationship between Liberal candidate spending and vote margins at the 1895 general election



Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database and Election Expenditure Database

significant efforts in trying to win Liberal seats, irrespective of the margin between the two parties. In particular, they spent much less than their Liberal counterparts on, firstly, attempting to win very marginal constituencies and, secondly, defending seats in which they were the incumbents. These tendencies suggest a potential correlation with the trends in effective, surplus and wasted votes outlined above. The Conservatives expended more effort attempting to win seats regardless of the likely outcome, wasting money on wasted votes, whereas the Liberals were much more strategic in their approach to funding their constituency campaigns.

Although recent studies have suggested that the national campaign is all-important during modern elections, with local canvassing efforts of little or no importance, in the absence of any national campaigns before World War One, local campaigning was the central feature of any general or by-election.⁴ Constituency election contests during the nineteenth century are commonly portrayed as events of great symbolic importance, imbued with public spectacle, but ultimately decided by local interests, deferential voting and established party loyalties. It is, however, possible to test this notion by assessing the impact of constituency-level campaigning, again using the amount spent on the local campaign as a surrogate measure for the intensity of the campaign. By

⁴ In terms of post-World War Two elections the Nuffield Studies on British general elections are a good example. As a counter to this see studies which suggest that the more that is spent in a constituency by a party the better its results, for example Pattie, Johnston and Fieldhouse (1995) and Pattie and Johnston (1996). For the pre-World War One period see, for example, Clarke (1971); Hanham (1978: 191-232).

regressing the change in each of the two parties' share of the vote between three separate pairs of elections against spending, for Conservative-held and Liberal-held seats, it is clear that the more each of the two parties spent on campaigning in a constituency, the greater the increase in their popular vote share. This was, however, a gradual process, barely noticeable in 1885, but much more pronounced by 1895. In addition it was not a uniform trend: Liberal candidates experienced the reward for a more strategic deployment of campaign efforts before their Conservative counterparts.

This emergent geography of different campaign strategies was accompanied by a modernisation of electioneering during the late nineteenth century, involving a transformation in how campaigns were communicated and a shift towards an increasingly strategic use of campaign funds. The returns generated by each candidate and reported under the provisions of the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act, which built on earlier legislation, can be used to examine what campaign funds were spent on. These returns have been used to compile Table 6.1 (below) which provides an itemised breakdown of constituency campaign expenditures during the later nineteenth century, with expenditure in each category expressed as a percentage of the total spent. The majority of campaign costs were the result of spending in three particular areas: Election Agents, printing (a category which also included advertising, stationary, postage and telegrams) and meeting the charges levied by Returning Officers for conducting the election.

Although expenditure on some items, such as Clerks, miscellaneous expenses and the Returning Officers charges remained stable throughout this period, there were some significant changes in the amounts spent on other

Table 6.1 Candidates' election expenses (as % of total expenditure), 1880-95⁵

	1880	1885	1886	1892	1895
Agents	39.3	25.4	24.6	23.7	23.1
Clerks & Messengers	-	9.7	9.4	9.4	9.3
Printing	20.8	26.2	30.6	30.9	31.8
Public Meetings	-	2.7	1.1	1.9	1.6
Committee Rooms	-	3.1	2.7	2.9	2.8
Miscellaneous Matters	34.2	6.3	6.1	7.0	6.8
Personal Expenses	-	4.8	3.8	4.6	4.9
Returning Officer's Charges	5.7	21.8	21.7	19.6	19.7

Source: Derived from Election Expenditure Database

campaign costs. Firstly, there was a decline in the amounts expended on retaining Election Agents across each constituency, from 39.3 per cent of all costs in 1880 to under one-quarter in 1895. These were typically local solicitors whose main purpose was to ensure that voter registration lists were maintained and to challenge the eligibility of voters added by an agent acting for an opponent (see, for example, Hanham, 1978: 233-48). This is indicative both of the substantially increased electorate after the passage of the Third Reform Act – with the consequence that attempts to control the composition of the electoral register became both unmanageable and pointless – and also the increasing professionalisation of election management, with professional agents paid for

⁵ The official returns for the 1880 general election included amounts spent on Clerks and Messengers, Public Meetings, Committee Rooms and Personal Expenses in the total for Miscellaneous Matters. This accounts for the much higher total for the category at this election.

by local parties or associations replacing the retained networks (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981: 51-2).⁶

More significant is the increase in the amounts spent on printing, particularly in light of the decreased sums spent on public meetings and committee rooms, during the same period. As a proportion of all expenditure, printing accounted for around one-fifth in 1885, a sum which had risen to almost one-third by 1895. This was an evolution led by Conservative candidates, rather than those standing as Liberals, although not in a co-ordinated or geographically distinct manner. The increased use of election advertising – handbills and pamphlets, for example – was a highly effective means of reaching out to the enlarged electorate, communicating a candidate's message to a much wider audience than public meetings were able to (see, for example, Lewis and Lewis, 1980). It also, however, facilitated the disciplining of the new, mass electorate, by separating candidates from the public political arena, hitherto symbolic of nineteenth century electoral contests, and allowing the transmission of increasingly crafted political messages. Indeed, as Vernon (1993: 105) argues, albeit for an earlier period, print was used to: 'reconstitute the public political sphere in an ever-more restrictive fashion, excluding groups believed to "irrational" like women and the illiterate poor from public political debate'. The modernisation of campaign communication techniques therefore had two faces: a greater ability to reach out and communicate with the electorate while

⁶ One particular consequence of this development was that local political associations now needed to raise funds themselves in order to retain paid agents.

simultaneously reinforcing the exclusion of particular sections of society from the political arena.

Aside from the sums expended on Agents and printing, the largest portion of the cost of an election was made up from the charges made by the Returning Officer for conducting the election. The Returning Officer played a crucial role in the supervision and administration of elections, with the position normally filled by the Sheriff in the counties and Mayors in boroughs. As had been the case with agents during the aristocratic era, the practice of levying heavy charges against candidates became common over the course of nineteenth century, essentially because there was no specific tariff of charges in use until after 1875. Consequently, the amounts claimed by Returning Officers varied greatly although in general counties cost more than boroughs and large boroughs more than small ones – in 1874, for example, the charges levied in Richmond totalled £12, in Manchester £1,457 and in the county constituency of Middlesex £2,373 (Hanham, 1978: 250).

Indeed, the 1874 general election saw the largest Returning Officers' charges of the period between the Second Reform Act and World War One. In the counties these rose from an average of £166 per constituency at the 1868 general election to £296 in 1874 before declining to £201 in 1880. Charges in borough constituencies followed a similar pattern, increasing from an average of £98 to £119 at the first two elections and then decreasing to £104 at the third. In both constituency types the average amount then remained at a similar level to 1880 through the period between 1885 and December 1910.⁷ This stability can

⁷ These high levels of expenditure, however, remained a major obstacle to working-class representation in Parliament. For example, the Labour Party

be traced to the impact of the 1875 Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers) Act which introduced a scale of charges which covered every conceivable item of expenditure, from the preparation and publication of the notice of election through to the fees for polling clerks, as well as dictating that any costs accrued by the Returning Officer be split equally among all candidates in a constituency.⁸ These actions reversed a provision in the 1872 Ballot Act that required candidates to pay for all expenses incurred by a Returning Officer, something which had greatly increased the costs of running for Parliament at the 1874 general election (Ewing, 1987: 107).

The final possible influence on the Liberal vote distribution is the gerrymandering of constituency boundaries. On the whole the definition of Parliamentary constituency boundaries in 1884 (as outlined in the previous chapter) was approached in an essentially bi-partisan manner, with a Boundary Commission appointed with representatives from both the Conservative and Liberal sides of the House of Commons. Although no one party controlled this ad-hoc Commission, preventing the instigation of a deliberate strategy of gerrymandering in favour of that party, the determination of the constituency

devoted 43 and 31 per cent of its total expenditure at the 1906 and January 1910 general elections respectively to paying the charges levied by Returning Officers. See also Pinto-Duschinsky (1981: 59-82).

⁸ Although the 1875 Act regulated the amount Returning Officers could charge for the conduct of an election, it retained the burden as one the candidates alone should bear. This was in contrast to Scotland where the cost of elections was borne through the rates. It was not until 1918 that the charges were transferred to the Treasury in England and Wales.

boundaries was still a politicised process. The Third Reform Act of 1884 released a total of 142 seats for redistribution, with their destinations decided by the political architects of the legislation rather than by any independent body. As a result a majority of the seats were assigned to areas in which the Liberals were traditionally the largest party: the metropolitan boroughs in London and the large manufacturing centres and industrialised regions of Britain (see Rossiter et al., 1999: 38-9). There was, however, no change of boundaries between 1885 and December 1910 so this cannot account for the increase in the pro-Liberal efficiency component during this period although it is possible that this was a by-product of the decisions made in 1884.

Summary

This chapter has shown that there were several factors influencing the efficiency of the two main parties' vote distributions. In general, the efficiency component benefited the Liberals in the British electoral system; this was evident at all but one general election between 1885 and December 1910. This was the result of the Conservative's vote share being less effectively distributed geographically compared with the Liberals. The former failed to make as many of their votes 'effective' as the latter and because the Liberals tended to win by smaller majorities, the Conservatives obtained more wasted votes per seat lost, on average. At the first general election of the period the pro-Liberal bias stood at five seats but by December 1910 had risen to 91, having peaked at 101 in 1906. This bias was the result of the combination of factors. First, the increasing geographical concentration of electoral support for the Liberals and the inability

of the Conservatives to win seats in areas outside of their southern English heartland ensured that the former achieved a more efficient distribution of votes.

Secondly, there are indications that the Liberals had begun to carefully target their constituency campaign efforts as early as the 1890s. Using data drawn from the official campaign expenditure returns that candidates were officially obliged to submit following an election, it is possible to discern two contrasting geographies of campaigning in individual constituencies. Typically, Liberal candidates expended little effort in trying to win seats that were heavily Conservative, but spent up to 60 per cent of the maximum amount allowed in marginal Conservative seats. More significant efforts were made to defend seats in which Liberal members were the incumbents, where candidates spent up to 80 per cent of the maximum scale allowed by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act. Contrastingly, Conservative candidates expended significant efforts in trying to win Liberal seats, irrespective of the margin between the two parties. In particular, they spent much less than their Liberal counterparts on, firstly, attempting to win very marginal constituencies and, secondly, defending seats in which they were the incumbents. These more strategic uses of campaign funds were accompanied by some important shifts in what candidates chose to spend their money on, most notably a move away from more public forms of campaigning towards a print-based culture.

Finally, the role of politicians in deciding the allocation of new Parliamentary seats in 1884 ensured that even without a concerted strategy of deliberate gerrymandering these were placed in areas of Liberal strength; this worked to the Liberals' advantage because of the inability of the Conservatives to increase

their electoral support enough to win seats outside of their traditional areas of strength.

The increasing pro-Liberal bias in the efficiency component was ultimately, therefore, the result of the changing geography of effective, surplus and wasted votes within the map of Parliamentary boundaries; this created the equivalent of a very significant gerrymander without any explicit gerrymandering ever having taken place. Furthermore, the evidence in this chapter strongly suggests that it was the Liberals who emerged as the first truly modern political party in Britain, pioneering new approaches to electioneering and manipulating the opportunities provided by the geography of effective votes to a greater extent than the Conservatives

Chapter 7

Enfranchisement, Turnout and Reactive Malapportionment

Previous chapters have dealt with the votes cast at elections – the prime issues being who for, how many and where – but as Johnston and Pattie (2006: 227) point out this is only the result of the two-part decision that voters are faced with. The choice of who to vote for follows just as significant a decision, which is whether to vote at all in the first place. As Johnston and Pattie (2006: 227) assert, ‘deciding whether to participate in the ballot is perhaps the most basic political statement of all at election time’. During the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries many established democracies have seen falling levels of turnout (Norris, 2002) – in Britain, for example, turnout fell to 59 per cent at the 2001 general election, the lowest rate of participation since 1918, with more electors abstaining than voting for Labour, the winning party. Even lower participation rates can be found in some ‘second order’ elections for bodies that are subordinate to and less powerful than national governments (Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 227); after 2000 for example turnout at UK local elections averaged between 30 and 35 per cent, while in 1999 just 24 per cent of eligible voters in the UK cast a vote in elections for the European Parliament (Johnston and Pattie, 2006: 227-8).

Turnout is, however, a modern preoccupation. During the nineteenth century little attention was paid to the number of abstentions or efforts made during

campaigns to increase the number of voters who turned out during the polling period. Instead the spotlight fell on the legislation which sought to increase the number of people who were able to vote and the political motivations of the parties who backed these attempts. Each of the three Reform Acts was first and foremost an attempt at broadening the franchise and sizable increases in the electorate followed each one. It is this increase, and the accompanying transformation of the social composition of the electorate, that has occupied academic studies of the nineteenth century.

However, the decision to participate or abstain did have significant ramifications for the electoral map and it is these that this chapter explores. It begins by outlining the growth of the nineteenth-century electorate, before moving on to question the idea that the expansion of the franchise was as broad as is conventionally assumed. It then moves on to explore those individuals who were either accidentally or deliberately excluded from electoral registers, and those who choose to abstain. The latter in particular played an important role in the final bias component – reactive malapportionment. This differs from the other components because it does not arise from the conventional processes of malapportionment and gerrymandering, but instead from the differential levels of voting and abstentions across the map of constituencies. Any bias due to reactive malapportionment is produced in two distinct ways. Firstly, differences between constituencies in the number of electors who abstain from voting produce an effect that is equivalent to the malapportionment effect if turnout levels are much lower in the constituencies won by one party than they are in those held by another. Secondly, it can result from differences between constituencies in the strength of 'third parties' (in this case the emergent Labour

party and other party labels, such as Lib-Lab). Electoral support for these can produce an effect similar to malapportionment by reducing the number of effective votes that are needed to win seats in areas where one party is stronger than another. This is unless the 'third parties' win seats there, which might work against the electoral interests of the stronger of the two main parties (Johnston et al., 2001b: 178).

Franchise Reform and the Growth of the Electorate

Alongside moves to redistribute Parliamentary seats to better reflect the new social, economic and demographic geographies of the nineteenth century, the extension of the right to vote was one of the major foci of the nineteenth century reform acts. The process of franchise extension has typically been seen as a necessary corrective for an electoral system which had become increasingly exclusionary, a trend which had begun as early as the English Civil War and had accelerated during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. So successful were the three Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1885 in increasing the numbers of adult males eligible to vote that by the end of the nineteenth century, Seymour (1915: 3) argues, they had 'increased the electorate so that from a relatively small and unevenly distributed number of voters it grew to include all but a comparatively slight portion of the adult male population'.

Numerically the pre-reform electorate was small. In 1754 the number of adult males with the right to vote in England and Wales is estimated at 282,000 – just 1 in 23 of the population and 1 in 6 of all adult males. By 1831 the electorate of England and Wales had risen to 439,200, an increase of 56 per cent; however,

during the same period the population had almost doubled and by failing to keep pace with this increase the ratio of those able to vote had decreased to 1 in 38 of the total population and approximately 1 in 8.5 of all adult males (Garrard, 2002: 21; Cannon, 1973: 30; O’Gorman, 1989: 179).¹ In Scotland the situation was far worse with only 1 in 100 of the male population able to vote in 1754, a ratio which increased further to 1 in 250 by 1831. The main cause of this was the restrictive franchise in use for most Scottish constituencies; in Edinburgh, for example, 33 corporate voters elected one MP to represent 162,000 people (Garrard, 2002: 21).

The accelerating disparity between the size of the British population and its electorate during the long eighteenth century can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, there was an increasing closure of the electoral system due partly to deliberately engineered legislative change. This was exacerbated by the failure to rework electoral boundaries and qualifications to take into account the accelerating economic and demographic change in Britain during this period. The number of different franchise types undoubtedly played a significant role in determining the size of the electorate. Most were narrowly drawn, particularly in

¹ Garrard (2002: 21) cites a figure of 366,000 for the electorate in 1831 based on an estimate by Cannon (1973). This has, however, been widely accepted as wrong since it does not take into account turnout: ‘the figures for ... 1831 do not allow for turnout: that for 1832 does. In other words, the registered electorate in 1832 comprises all males entitled to vote. The figures for the earlier dates show only electors *who actually voted*, and should therefore be adjusted upwards to allow for those who failed to vote’ (O’Gorman, 1989: 182). As a result most estimates have been increased upwards by 20 per cent.

the small boroughs which dominated the Parliamentary landscape, and they sometimes allowed no-one other than the self-elected corporations or certain types of property owner to vote. The consequence of this was that electorates were small and remained so despite a rapidly increasing population. There were some exceptions to this rule, with some borough electoral qualifications such as the scot-and-lot, potwalloper and some freeman constituencies so broadly defined that almost all adult males were included within them (Garrard, 2002: 20). Taking the size of the electorate at face value it would seem fair to agree with Cannon (quoted in O’Gorman, 1989: 182), therefore, that during the period 1754-1832, ‘there was a sharp decline in the proportion of the people who had even a formal share in the political life of the nation’.

O’Gorman (1989), however, has argued that it would be misleading to assume a decline in the pre-reform electorate relative to the rising population based only on its numerical size. Adopting a position that has not been without criticism, he asserts that the unreformed electoral system was more like the reformed one that has previously been allowed for, both in terms of its social composition and its ability to mirror the important demographic and social changes that were happening within the wider society.² Although the supposed exclusion of the middle classes, particularly those in urban areas, by the franchise was at the centre of much of the radical propaganda during the agitation for reform in 1830-1, both O’Gorman and Phillips (1992) claim that the composition rather than the size of the electorate was reflective of the economic and industrial change the nation as a whole was experiencing at the time and it is the former

² For criticisms of O’Gorman’s argument see Beales (1992) and the response to this from O’Gorman himself (O’Gorman, 1993).

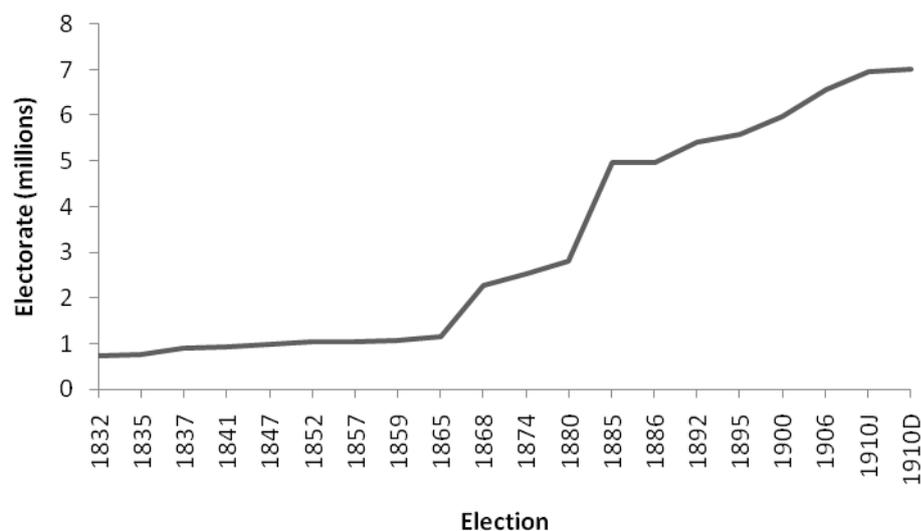
that is the more important measure of the inclusiveness of the franchise. Middling-order males dominated most constituency electorates, which when taken overall were estimated to contain, during the pre-1832 period, 13.6 per cent gentry and professionals, 5.8 per cent merchants and manufacturers, 20.5 per cent retailers, 39.5 per cent skilled craftsmen, 14.2 per cent semi-skilled workers, and 6.4 per cent in agricultural occupations (Phillips, 1992: 253). In addition, rather than shutting out new social groupings as they emerged over the course of the eighteenth century, different occupational groups were easily incorporated into the electorate under the terms of the existing franchises, including a large rurally-based elite, many professionals, large numbers of craftsmen and artisans and a large retail sector (O’Gorman, 1989: 172-223; see also Seymour, 1915: 533). However, based on the analysis of occupational structure developed by Royle (1987: 80-1) using the earlier work of Perkin (1969: 20-1), it is clear that the electorate was not broadly reflective of the social structure of the nation, over-representing the gentry and agricultural occupations, and under-representing merchants and manufacturers.

From 1832 onwards the size of the British electorate grew substantially as three separate pieces of reform legislation progressively broadened the number of adult males able to participate in the electoral process (Figure 7.2).³ The 1832 Franchise Reform Act resulted in the British electorate growing to 722,870, an increase of 65 per cent. In England and Wales alone the electorate grew by 49 per cent because of two key modifications to the franchise system. The first was the adoption of a uniform £10 male household qualification in the

³ This was a move that was counterbalanced by disenfranchisement, for example through the redistribution of Parliamentary seats.

boroughs, with those electors who no longer qualified under this franchise allowed to keep their votes for life and, in the case of freemen, to transfer them to their heirs. Secondly, there was the creation of new categories of tenant elector in the counties (the £10 copyholder and the £50 tenant-at-will) which, in the case of England and Wales, were added to the traditional 40-shilling freehold franchise (Machin, 2001: 20-1). In Scotland, under the Scottish Reform Act, different modifications were made to the franchise system. A reduction in the property-owning qualification from £100 to £10, the addition of £10 and £50 leaseholders (subject to certain conditions) and of tenants of property worth £50 to the county franchise and the implementation of an identical borough franchise to the one in England and Wales brought about a particularly large increase in the number of electors with the 4,500 electors of 1831 being joined by another 60,000 – this was an increase of 1,233 per cent (Garrard, 2002: x).

Figure 7.1 The size of the British electorate, 1832-December 1910



Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 97-100)

Despite all these changes the right to vote was still inextricably linked to property and privilege and, as a result, the Reform Acts of 1832 failed to represent a fundamental reworking of the electoral system. As Figure 7.1 shows the electorate as a whole continued to rise of the next three decades because of the rising value of real property, although in some constituencies rising values did not counterbalance the death rate among ancient right voters (those who had held wide and narrow qualifications) and the electorate actually declined (Machin, 2001: 21). In addition, the 1832 Acts formalised the exclusion of women from the vote for the first time. By 1865 – the final general election before the passage of the 1867 Franchise Reform Acts – the British electorate had reached 1.15 million through natural growth and grew by another 1.11 million in time for the 1868 election following enactment of its franchise modifications. The impact of these varied considerably between county constituencies on the one hand, where the requirements remained much tougher, and the boroughs on the other. In the former adult male householders of 12 months standing within the borough of registration were enfranchised, as well as £10 lodgers resident at their address for 12 months; together these changes resulted in an increase in the electorate of 138 per cent. The counties saw a much smaller growth in their electorate, with the addition of adult male £5 lease and copyholders and £12 occupiers of 12 months standing resulting in a 38 per cent growth in the number of electors (Garrard, 2002: xii).⁴

The continued extension of the franchise was a secondary consideration of the 1884/5 Franchise Reform and Redistribution Acts whose primary purpose

⁴ The qualification for the vote in Scottish counties was not lowered from £15 to £12 as in England and Wales but instead was fixed at £14.

was to create more equal electoral districts through a fundamental reorganisation of Parliamentary constituencies. Whereas the 1867 Act had begun to lay the foundations of a standard franchise across the United Kingdom, the 1884/5 reforms went much further and standardised the adult male householder and lodger franchise across the country. This change resulted in a 75 per cent increase in the English electorate and an 88 and 91 per cent growth in those of Wales and Scotland respectively (Garrard, 2002: xiii).⁵ Through further natural growth the British electorate stood at almost 7.03 million by the general election of 1910, an increase of 1600 per cent over the pre-reform position of 1831 and 972 per cent over 1832.

Although the British electorate clearly grew in size substantially up to then, the existence of plural voters means that the actual size of the electorate was probably slightly less than the figures above. Sometimes referred to as out-voters or duplicate voters, these were individuals who were permitted to possess more than one – sometimes a dozen or more – voting qualifications. It is difficult to estimate exactly how many electors were plural voters; attempts to examine the qualifications held by voters during the nineteenth century, such as in the plural vote return of 1888, met with limited success. However, Blewett (1965: 31) has calculated that there were at least 500,000 to 600,000 plural voters in 1911 (approximately seven per cent of the electorate), although he also notes that other estimates have ranged more widely from 200,000 up to one million. Blewett's total is comprised of around 400,000 plural voters found in the counties, a further 100,000 from the boroughs and the 46,470 university

⁵ In Ireland the impact of this change was even more spectacular with a 222 per cent growth in the number of electors.

voters, with the remainder drawn from a considerable proportion of the freeman vote.

The reason for the concentration of plural voters in county seats lay in the persistence of the ancient view that boroughs were part of counties but counties not part of the boroughs. The consequences of this position were amplified by the division of county constituencies into single member seats in 1885, a move which vastly increased the extent of plural voting. This created a scenario where, for example, a man holding the appropriate qualification could vote twice, once in a county division and once in the borough constituency that was located within the former. By contrast, a man who possessed the right to vote in a borough seat was only allowed to vote there and did not possess a dual qualification for the county constituency. In both cases an individual could possess a voting qualification in more than one geographically distinct constituency.

As a consequence of this plural voters were concentrated into four distinct geographical types. The first was London, whose division into 28 boroughs after 1885 enabled plural voting on a scale not possible anywhere else. Blewett (1965) estimates that about five per cent of all London voters were qualified to vote in more than one borough constituency within the metropolitan area, while another 10 per cent were also entitled to vote in a county division as well. Secondly, many of the commercial constituencies of major cities, such as Birmingham Central, Glasgow Central, Manchester Northwest, Liverpool Exchange and the City of London, contained a large number of plural voters. The latter is the best example since at least 90 per cent of its electors were in possession of multiple qualifications. As would be expected, county seats that

adjoined major cities constituted the third concentration; these contained those electors who held a freehold qualification within the city but who mostly had no link with the county constituency they had been allocated to. Finally, there were those rural, sparsely populated county constituencies which contained one or more Parliamentary boroughs within their boundaries. As well as these four concentrations, the electors of the five university seats were nearly all plural voters.

Although there were moves to reduce the extent of plural voting during the redrawing of constituency boundaries in 1885 by moving borough freeholders into adjoining county constituencies where they had no residential or property interests, a move which would deliberately disenfranchise them, the political will of the Conservatives saw that the impact of this was limited. The Tories were ardent defenders of plural voting because, for them, it represented the centrality of property to the franchise, guaranteed local interests and asserted the direct link between taxation and representation. Liberal attempts to eliminate it were dismissed as attempts to gerrymander the electorate in their own interest, although such a view was not developed from a position of neutrality: Blewett (1965: 49-50) calculates that at the general election in January 1910 the plural vote split 58 to 42 per cent in favour of the Tories.

With the British electorate having risen substantially over the course of the century, it is clear that as Britain had begun to move towards a more democratic suffrage. More people were able to vote in 1910 than at any time previously, although because of the existence of a large number of plural voters these figures may be an over estimate. Clearly, however, it is important to draw a distinction between those people who could merely vote once and those who

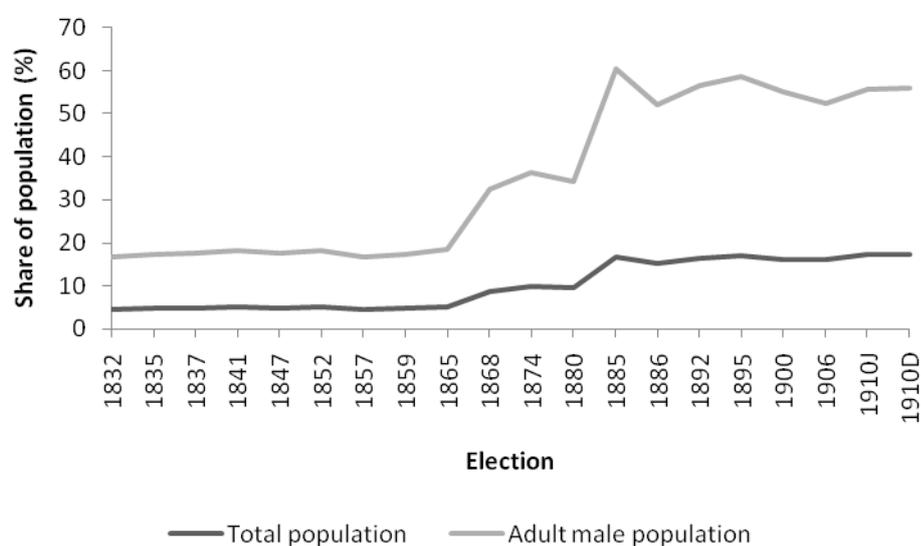
could vote more than once – there were men who possessed more power than others so the franchise remained an unequal playing field, a imbalance that some parties who were keen to preserve.

The Inclusiveness of the Franchise

While the three reform acts certainly increased the size of the electorate over the course of the nineteenth century, the franchise itself was still far from an inclusive. As Figure 7.2 shows, there were still a substantial number of people who remained outside of the electoral process. Immediately after the First Reform Act in 1832 a little under 20 per cent of the adult male population of Britain was able to vote, a figure which increased to around one-third after 1868 and to around 60 per cent in 1885. Although such growth in the electorate represented a substantial increase in the number of voters over the course of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding a slight decline during the 1900s, this is less spectacular if the number of registered voters is seen as a proportion of the total population: in this case no more than 18 per cent of the British populace were eligible to cast a vote. Indeed, the actual number may have been much lower since, as noted above, there was a largely unquantified number of plural voters swelling the electoral registers of many constituencies.⁶

⁶ In addition Figure 7.2 overestimates the number of adult males of voting age. This used census data from 1911 which was grouped by age, one category being 15-24. This has meant that the number used for the adult male calculations inevitably includes those who were too young to vote but who were enumerated in this category.

Figure 7.2 Electorate as a proportion of the total population and the adult male population of Britain, 1832-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 97-100) and decennial census returns

Table 7.1 The regional geography of electorate sizes

	1832	1868	1885	1910
Scotland	5.8	14.2	31.3	38.4
Wales	9.2	17.3	36.1	34.3
North	11.6	17.3	37.2	36.1
North West	7.8	18.5	32.7	33.1
Yorkshire	8.2	15.2	37.5	36.9
East	8.1	13.6	37.9	36.6
East Midlands	12.1	19.5	39.7	38.9
South East	8.3	14.1	19.3	24.5
South Midlands	9.6	12.6	28.3	25.9
South West	9.4	16.0	35.3	39.6
West Midlands	11.2	21.7	36.3	36.7

Source: Calculated from Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 97-100) and 1831, 1871, 1881 and 1911 census returns

There was a distinct geography of disenfranchisement, as Table 7.1 shows; this uses data drawn from the censuses of 1831, 1871, 1881 and 1911 to show the number of electors in Scotland, Wales and the nine regions of England as a proportion of the total adult male population in that area. Immediately after the First Reform Act, at the 1832 general election, the number of individuals able to vote varied greatly across Britain, ranging from just under six per cent of the adult male population in Scotland through to around 12 per cent in the East Midlands. Such disparities persisted after each of the following two Reform Acts and through to the general election of December 1910. In 1868 Scotland was, again, the region with the lowest level of enfranchisement, although this time it was alongside the South East, while in the West Midlands a little over one-fifth of all adult males were now able to vote.

The substantial jump in the numbers of voters following the Third Reform Act was reflected in all regions of the country, with one notable exception. Whereas all regions saw the number of adult males increase to between 28 and 40 per cent, the South East – a core Conservative area – saw its level of disenfranchisement fall by just five percentage points so that a little over four-fifths of the adult male population of the region were still unable to vote. In most regions there was little change between 1885 and December 1910, indeed in many the numbers eligible to vote actually fell slightly. This had some implications for the two main parties: for the Liberals the electorates in the areas where they were strongest tended to increase or only decline slightly, whereas the electorates in Tory areas such as the South East and South Midlands – or areas where the Tories were beginning to make inroads such as the West Midlands and North West – were smaller (as a percentage of the total

population) and tended to either grow much more slowly than in Liberal areas or decline in size.

The excluded were a diverse set of individuals but one which can be divided into two specific groupings. First there were the deliberately excluded, including everybody under the voting age, all women of voting age, most servants as well as a further four in ten adult males, the latter because of their failure to hold the correct qualifications under the franchise.⁷ There was a second group of individuals, estimated to total at least one million men each year, who were eligible to vote but were temporarily excluded through a combination of stringent residence requirements and the complexities of the registration timetable (Machin, 2001: 101). Although a large number of people were excluded from the electoral process because of its rules and operation, with the sole exception of Blewett (1965), they have remained absent from studies of the nineteenth century franchise.

⁷ Although not able to vote, women still played an important role in electoral politics. Cragoe (2000) reveals that Victorian candidates and canvassers sought to use the influence of voters' wives to secure support. This was a continuation of an approach first adopted in the Hanoverian period. See also Richardson (1996) on the role played by women in electoral politics during the 1830s and Gleadle (2000), Morgan (2000) and Thompson (1993) on their participation in popular politics and protest. While Harrison (1983) provides an overview of the debate over female suffrage at Westminster, both Clark (1996) and Rendall (2000) provide more in-depth examination of discussions of female suffrage during the nineteenth-century franchise reforms. The role of women in reviving grassroots Toryism is examined in Gleadle (2007).

A wide variety of individuals were specifically excluded from voting. While the denial of the vote to women met with ongoing protest (Holton, 1986; Liddington and Norris, 1978; Purvis and Holton, 2000; Van Wingerden, 1999), other groups aroused little controversy. Those who were considered incapable or unworthy of exercising the vote – lunatics, criminals, aliens, those guilty of corrupt practices at elections, and those receiving poor relief (see Sims, 1984) – were joined in their exclusion by individuals concerned with the conduct of elections, such as returning officers, peers in elections to the House of Commons and, in some instances police officers because of their role in assuring the lawful conduct of the poll (Blewett, 1965: 33). While these individuals were explicitly excluded under electoral law, others were unable to vote simply because they did not come within any of the franchise categories. Domestic servants who were resident with their employers typically fell into this grouping, as did sons living with their parents and soldiers living in barracks. However, rather than addressing this anomaly, the franchise elements of the Third Reform Act were specifically drafted to continue to exclude these individuals, commonly for party political reasons. Live-in servants were seen as being particularly susceptible to influence by their Tory-voting employers; similarly the Liberals were reluctant to ease restrictions on sons who continued to live with the parents unless they could also reduce the lodger rental qualification (something that they were unsuccessful in achieving) since changes to the former alone would tend to favour the upper-classes. Soldiers were excluded because their barrack accommodation did not meet with the requirements of any franchise, but the Liberals were unconcerned with this because of the belief that a majority of soldiers usually voted Tory (Blewett, 1965: 33). Collectively, it is estimated that

the number of adult males who were excluded by the franchise either explicitly or because they were not provided for stood at 1.5 million, or 12 per cent of the adult male population of the United Kingdom, by 1911 (Blewett, 1965: 34).

Many other individuals, otherwise qualified to vote, were excluded because of the capricious nature of electoral law or the cumbersome operation of the registration process – the accidentally excluded. In all Machin (2001: 101) estimates that there were a further one million adult males who each year were temporarily excluded from the electorate for one reason or another. The first of these was the sheer number of franchises which existed and the need to work out during the registration process under exactly which one the potential voter qualified, a process which frequently relied on the individual to produce evidence to support their claim. Although Blewett himself distinguishes seven distinct franchise types (property, freeman, university, occupation, household, lodger and service), there were, when variations of these are taken into account, possibly as many as 19 well known franchises in operation in 1912, for example (Blewett, 1965: 30-1). This quantity was, Blewett (1965: 30) argues, the result of ‘a long process of cumulative legislation with little codification. ... [S]uch was the “intricacy” that there was doubt as to the exact number of franchises in operation’.

Without there being a single franchise in place across both the nations and constituencies of Britain, it was relatively easy for individuals to fall victim to antiquated provisions and complicated franchise laws. Occupation, household, lodger and service franchises all required 12 months possession of qualification before first registration, while some property owners were required to have owned qualifying premises for six months but for most others no period of

ownership was required. In contrast, university voters and freemen were not required to have completed any type of qualification for any period of time previous to their registration. There were also important differences in the operation of particular franchises between the constituent nations of Britain. For those franchises that were dependent on the payment of rates, the difference between their compound payment in England and Wales and the requirement for personal payment in Scotland meant that individuals qualified to vote in one nation were not eligible to do so in another under the same franchise; annually, this particular discrepancy disqualified about 60,000 electors (Machin, 2001: 101).

By far the most limiting obligation of many franchises was the requirement that individuals had to be resident at a particular address for a certain period of time before they could obtain the vote and, once it had been granted, that they remained there. Residence requirements were first introduced by the 1832 Reform Acts and subsequently retained by both the 1867 and 1885 Acts; as Garrard (2002: 48) writes, 'the intention was to increase the elector's political 'safety' by cementing his relationship to property, interest and community. [...] The purpose was to exclude working men whose poverty and/or occupations rendered them geographically unstable and thus politically unsafe'. It was not until the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act that this constraint was relaxed (see Tanner, 1983).

Lodgers were the group most affected by the residence requirement – indeed, it was even strengthened against them in the Third Reform Act. They remained qualified to vote providing that they remained in the same house – changes of room were allowed – but if they took lodgings in another house, even within the

same constituency, then their right to vote was lost. In essence the lodger franchise required immobility, but by limiting the scope for successive occupations the voting opportunities of the more mobile sections of the population were severely curtailed. This was particularly the case for professional groups such as ministers, teachers and government officials, in addition to the working classes who had to follow the tide of industry employment from place to place (Blewett, 1965: 36; Garrard, 2002: 48).

Lodgers in borough constituencies were especially hard hit: roughly 20 to 30 per cent of the electorate moved each year (compared to just under five per cent in county seats) (Blewett, 1965: 36). The requirement for relative immobility was reinforced both by the disputed definition of what exactly constituted 'lodging' and the requirement for the rental value of the room to exceed £10 annually, a level which excluded many, particularly in rural districts; furthermore, lodgers were required to state their claim to vote annually rather than it being automatically carried forward each year. The onerous nature of the lodger franchise played a significant role in some areas of Britain where the individuals who qualified for the vote under its provisions made up a substantial proportion of the electorate. This was especially the case in London where over 50 per cent of the total lodger vote was concentrated in 1911; this equated to around 13.5 per cent of all voters in metropolitan constituencies being qualified under the lodger qualification. No other cities in Britain approached this figure: only 21 boroughs (and 15 county seats) outside of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow had a lodger vote higher than 10 per cent of the electorate (Blewett, 1965: 40-1). Blewett (1965: 42) suggests that the geographical concentration of the lodger vote was a response to party needs: of the 36 seats, 22 were long-term

marginal constituencies while another six had been lost by one or other of the two main party groupings after more than 20 years in their possession.

Cumulatively, however, stringent occupation clauses were responsible for disenfranchising about one million voters annually (Blewett, 1965: 36).

The final cause of accidental disenfranchisement was the cumbersome operation of the registration process. For all potential voters there was a six month delay between the original preparation of the register in July and when it became effective on January 1st of the following year.⁸ Therefore, for most voters, 18 months was the minimum period necessary to get on the effective register. If a voter changed their type of qualification or their place of residence any time within 12 months prior to July, this meant that they would have to wait two and a half years before once more being entitled to vote. The cumulative effect of these delays and residence requirements was that the average period for provisional qualification was contemporaneously regarded as about twenty-five months (Blewett, 1965: 35). The consequences of population turnover were therefore felt at most general elections, its extent mediated by the elapsed age of the electoral register upon which it was being fought, none less than at the general election of December 1910. This was fought using a register almost 18 months old, during which time an average of 30 per cent of the electorate in borough constituencies, for example, had moved (Blewett, 1965: 36). In all,

⁸ Blewett (1965: 37-40) examines why the process of registration took so long in more detail – among the myriad of reasons were the inaccurate nature of the lists the register was based on, the complexity of franchises, the requirement to provide proof of claims, and dealing with objections by private individuals and party officials.

Blewett (1965: 43) estimates that at least half of the five million adult males not qualified to vote were eliminated because of the workings of the registration system, noting that:

A system alleged to establish manhood suffrage in principle, fell far short in practice. ... No doubt apathy explains a significant proportion of the non-registered, but such apathy was influenced by the obstacles, party chicanery, and legal sophistries in the process of registration.

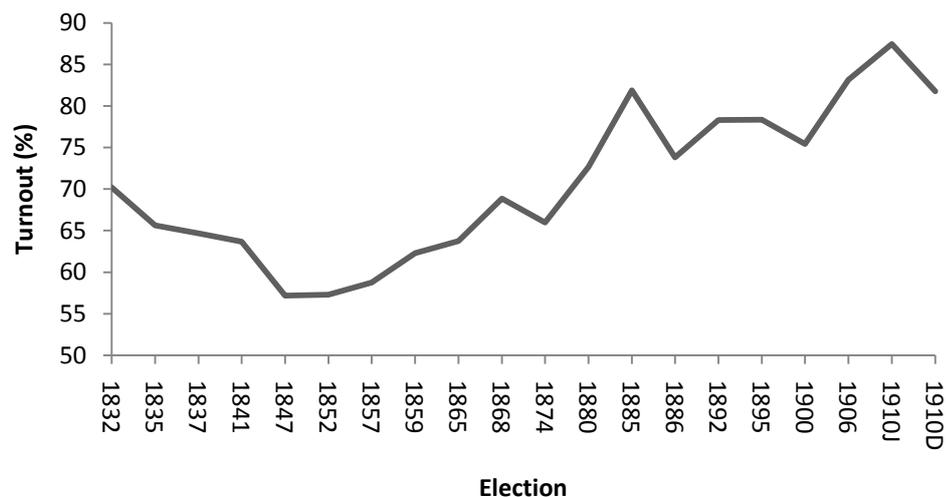
Registration served to deflate the principles of the franchise, and even the completed register, inadequate as it was, was described by one of its makers as "a trophy of party trickery and manipulation". It was indeed a system of "democracy tempered by registration".

Turnout

The failure of literature about franchise reform to address the real representativeness of the franchise is accompanied by an implicit assumption that each new elector made use of their vote once it had been awarded to them. However, there is no reason to expect that everyone able to vote will (or did) choose to participate in the democratic process and this section turns its attention away from the extension of the franchise, the increase in size of the electorate and those excluded from participating in the political process to look at the issue of turnout at nineteenth-century elections, something that is completely absent from the historiography of the franchise. Differential levels of turnout are responsible for the production of the reactive malapportionment component of the bias measure; as Johnston et al. (2001b: 178) state:

'differences between constituencies in the number of electors who abstain ... can produce the equivalent of a malapportionment effect if turnout levels are on average much lower in the constituencies won by one party than they are in those held by the other'.

Figure 7.3 Turnout at general elections in Britain, 1832-December 1910



Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 97-100)

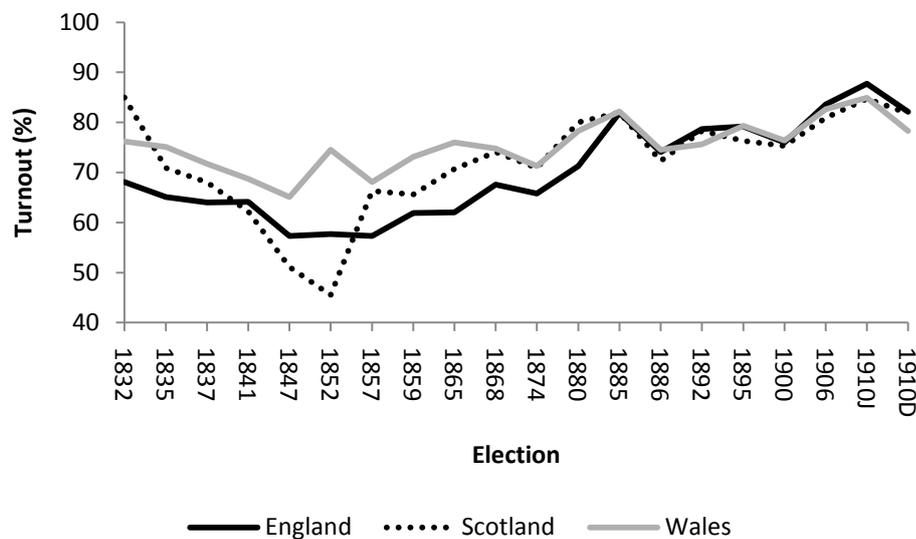
On the whole the period between 1832 and December 1910 saw increasing levels of participation in the electoral process. Turnout amongst the registered electorate in Britain rose over the course of the nineteenth century, as Figure 7.3 shows, although at the first few general elections of the post-Reform period there was initially a fall in the rate of participation. Turnout was a little over 70 per cent at the 1832 general election but it then fell over the next four elections to a low point of 57.2 per cent in 1847. Thereafter, however, it increased almost continually, surpassing the turnout recorded in 1832 at the 1880 contest before reaching a high of 87.5 per cent in January 1910; at the final general election of

the period eleven months later in December it declined slightly to 81.8 per cent. It is important to note that turnout was actually likely to be slightly lower than the levels shown here, for a number of reasons: first, the number of plural voters on the register likely inflated the size of the electorate; second, because of the exclusion of people who were otherwise qualified to vote but could not because of the operation of the registration system (see above); and, thirdly, because the ageing of the electoral registers – the time elapsed between the completion of the register, it coming into force and its use for an election – ensured that many registers included people who were no longer able to vote, for whatever reason, or did not necessarily include those who were able to but were not included in the initial listings.

At least to begin with turnout varied across English, Scottish and Welsh constituencies (Figure 7.4). From 1885 onwards the three nations experienced broadly similar levels of turnout, but up until then England and, more strikingly (particularly in the case of the 1852 general election), Scotland saw levels of participation that were in the range of around five to ten percentage points lower than in Wales. There were also differences between constituency types. Turnout tended to be substantially lower in county seats (other than in January 1910 it was on average 10 percentage points lower), indicative perhaps of the generally larger size of these constituencies compared with those falling under the borough franchise. The smaller size of these brought significant benefits: for the voter the travel distance to their polling place was much less than in county constituencies, while entrenched local interests – employers, guilds, landlords for example – were much more able to ensure turnout amongst their blocks of voters was high than they were in much larger constituencies. Inter-country

differences in participation rates were the result not of differential levels of turnout in county seats but because of varying levels in the boroughs; participation rates in English and particularly Scottish borough seats were much lower than in Wales.

Figure 7.4 Turnout at general elections in England, Scotland and Wales, 1832-December 1910



Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2000: 97-100)

There are numerous reasons for differential levels of turnout but while a rich base of studies of post-World War Two turnout in Britain has developed to explain this phenomenon, there has been no specific examination of electoral turnout for any earlier period.⁹ At the broadest level Norris (2002) outlines four

⁹ On the declining political participation across established democracies more generally see, for example, Crewe and Thompson (1999), Franklin (2002; 2004), Gray and Caul (2000), Marshall and Fisher (2008) and Norris (1998; 2002). The issue of low turnout at 'second order' elections (i.e. for bodies

'meta-theories' of political participation which can be used to explain differences in turnout both between nations and within a single nation over time. Writing about post-World War Two political activism and participation, she notes that the most common are modernisation theories, typified by Bell (1999), Inglehart (1997) and Dalton (1998). These suggest that common social trends such as rising standards of living, the growth of the service sector, and expanding educational opportunities in postindustrial societies have contributed to increased public participation in the political process while simultaneously weakening the support base of traditional hierarchical organisations and authorities such as churches, parties and interest groups, such as trade unions. In contrast to these, institutional accounts emphasise how the structure of the state sets the opportunities for participation. This approach is exemplified by

subordinate to national government) is examined by Heath et al. (1999), Reif (1997) and Schmitt (2005). Much of the literature on the decline in post-war turnout in Britain has focused around the notion that democracy itself is in crisis because it is failing to engage and motivate people in both electoral and non-electoral political activities and because trust in politicians has declined (Bromley et al., 2004). Much of the evidence for this is based on survey data, particularly from the British Electoral Survey (BES). See, for example, Clarke et al. (2004), Crewe et al. (1977), Parry et al. (1992) and Pattie and Johnston (2001). The relationship between the social composition of constituencies and turnout is discussed by Crewe and Payne (1971), Curtice and Steed (1992) and Denver and Halfacree (1992a; 1992b). There are many analyses of turnout at specific elections – see, for example, Denver and Hands (1997) and on the 1997 general election and Curtice (2005) for the 2005 general election.

Powell (1986b) and Jackman (1987), who both argue that differences in the development of electoral laws, party systems and constitutional frameworks are key to understanding differential levels of turnout between nations. The third broad approach to understanding differences in turnout between nations is characterised by the work of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993); agency theories like theirs focus on the role of traditional mobilising organisations in civic society and how they recruit, organise and engage activists – political parties and trade unions, for example. Finally, the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995) places social inequalities (in resources such as educational skills and socioeconomic status and motivational factors such as personal interest in politics) at the centre of its explanation of who participates in the political process.

Clearly some of these approaches are more applicable to nineteenth-century Britain than others. Institutional accounts, with their focus the ability of constitutional and institutional frameworks to determine exactly who can participate, would seem to be the most appropriate, since they can be used to account for changes in, for example, the franchise and the evolution of the modern system of political parties. However, elements of others are equally as applicable – the emphasis agency theories place on the role of civic society and its mobilising agents fits well with the explanation of democratisation developed by Garrard (2002), for instance. Others are less applicable, with the emphasis on the decline of traditional hierarchical organisations and authorities in modernisation theories providing a poor match to the development of political parties, trade unions and the like in later nineteenth century Britain. Also, the link between church attendance and political participation has clearly changed

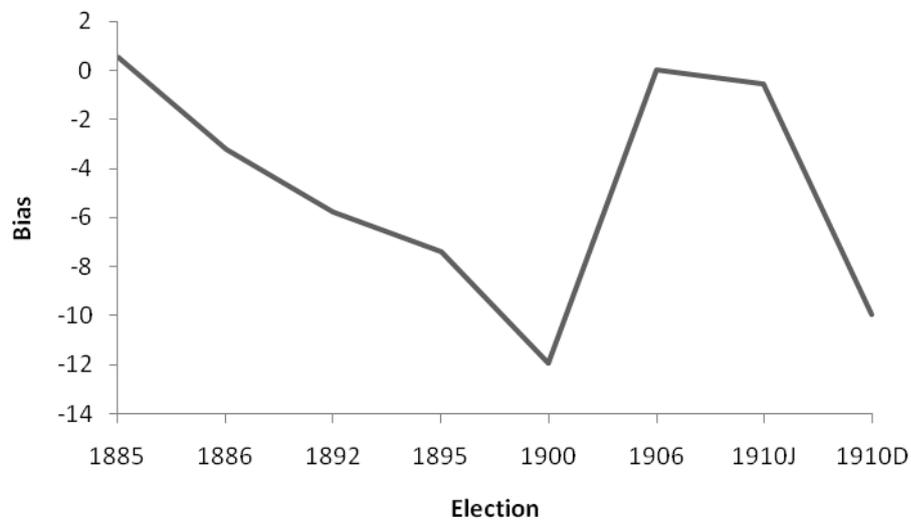
dramatically; religious culture in nineteenth-century England, Scotland and Wales was highly politicised in many different ways and varied both according to religious denomination and in intensity (see, for example, Cragoe (1995)).

On a more individual level there are a variety of reasons why people do not vote, all of which could equally be applied to Pre-World War Two elections. Some people abstain from voting involuntarily because they are unable to vote on the day (or, in the case of most nineteenth-century elections, during the polling period which was spread across several days), perhaps because of illness or because they are prevented from going to the polling booth. Others choose not to exercise their right to vote voluntarily because they have no particular reason to use it. They may believe that their vote does not matter, for example, they may not have a commitment to a particular party, may consider the outcome of the election to be irrelevant, because the party in power does not affect what happens to them or the country, or they may have no faith in the democratic process (Johnston and Pattie, 1997; Johnston et al., 2001b: 179).

Figure 7.5 shows that the abstentions bias component was to the Conservatives' advantage at all but the 1885 and 1906 general elections; such a consistent trend in favour of the Tories was unique among the components of the bias measure. Between 1886 and 1900 their gains from this component grew steadily from just three seats at the former election to 12 by the latter. Although there was a reversal of the bias to one that favoured the Liberals by just a single seat in 1906 and no advantage for either party in January 1910, by the second general election of that year in December, the Conservatives once again benefitted, this time by 10 seats. In general, therefore, it was the Conservatives who were the beneficiaries of increasing levels of turnout,

although it is also notable that the two general elections had which the pro-Conservative bias was greatest – 1900 and December 1910 – were also the two elections during the post-Third Reform Act period which saw an increase in the number of abstentions compared with the previous contest.

Figure 7.5 Bias due to abstentions, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Explaining Variations in Turnout

Why were there such variations in turnout at the constituency scale? Johnston et al. (2001b: 181-2, 187) identify three possible explanations. First, they argue that it is more rational for an individual to vote if they think it will make a difference. Consequently, electors in marginal constituencies, where a very small number of votes could swing the contest between the two parties, should be more likely to vote than those in a safe seat. Studies of the relationship between marginality and turnout at postwar British elections have shown a link

between the expected competitiveness of an election (measured through pre-election opinion polling) and the subsequent levels of participation (Heath and Taylor, 1999; Pattie and Johnston, 2001; Whiteley et al., 2001), while other research, such as that by Denver (1995), Denver and Hands (1974; 1985), Mughan (1986) and Pattie and Johnston (1998), has underlined the relationship between constituency marginality and turnout. Second, assuming that electors will be more motivated to vote when they have information about both the contest and its participants, the more parties attempt to encourage them to turnout through intensive campaigning, the greater likelihood they will vote.¹⁰ Finally, if turnout is lower in areas where one party is particularly strong this will reduce the number of effective votes needed for victory; thus, in terms of bias, low turnout in areas where the Conservatives are strong, for example, will be to their advantage.

Figure 7.6 outlines the evidence for the first explanation. This shows the relationship between the marginality of a constituency at one election and the turnout at the next at each general election between 1886 and December 1910.¹¹ For each pair of elections the turnout for each contested constituency at the first contest is shown on y (vertical) axis (i.e. in the case of Figure 7.6(a) the turnout in 1885) and the marginality of the contest – operationalised as the difference between the vote shares attained by the Conservative and Liberal candidates at the second contest – is plotted on the x (horizontal) axis. Each

¹⁰ There has been extensive research into the impact of constituency campaigns. For a review of this work see Johnston and Pattie (2006: 199-202).

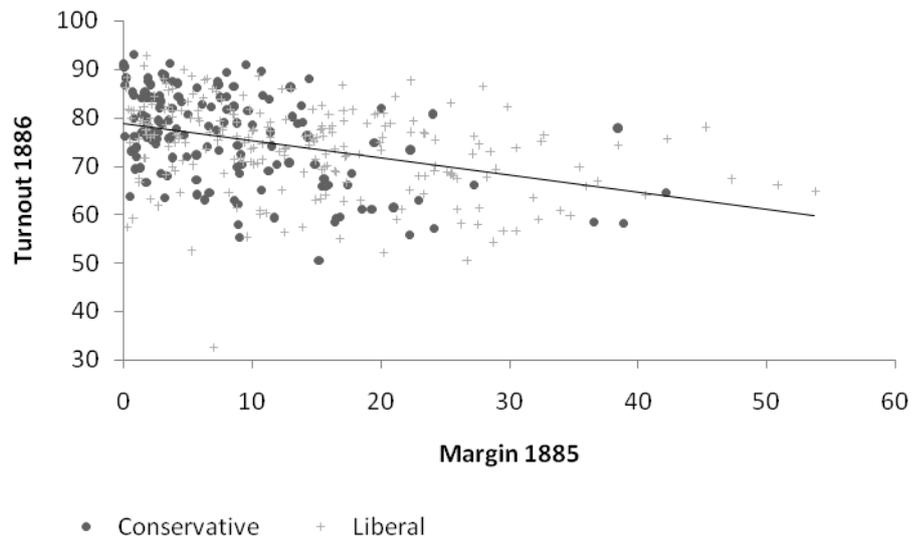
¹¹ It is not possible to do this for the 1885 contest because of the changes in constituency boundaries enacted by the Third Reform Acts.

individual graph in Figure 7.6 includes every constituency that was contested at both of the elections in the pair.

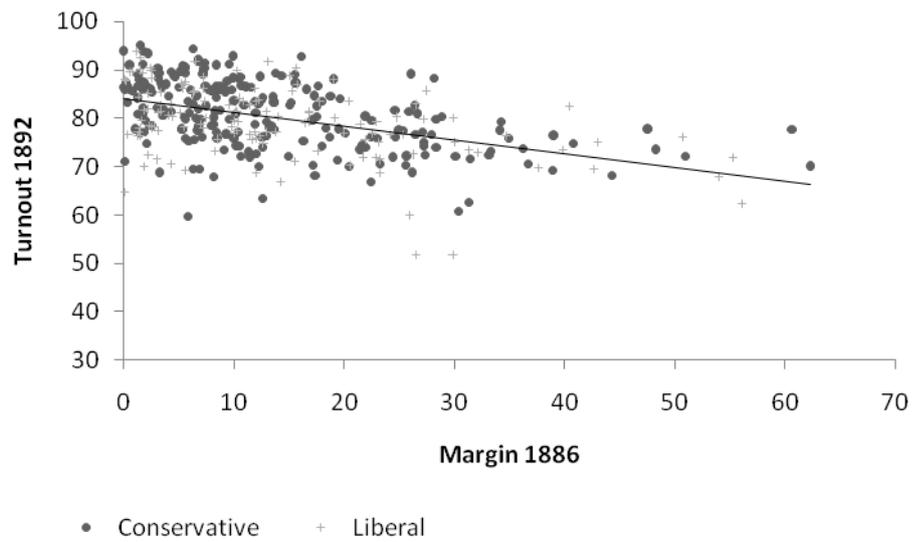
For the hypothesis suggested by Johnston et al. to hold there would have to be a negative relationship between marginality and turnout – in other words, ‘the larger the margin, the smaller the turnout, because the imperative to vote is less where the margin of victory was great last time’ (Johnston et al., 2001b: 182). In the case of the relationships shown in Figure 7.6 the overall associations when all constituencies are taken into account were weak, with the slight negative relationship more often the result of a small number of outliers. At some elections – 1886, 1895, 1900 and January 1910 – however, there was a reasonably clear distinction between seats won by Conservative candidates at the previous election and those won by the Liberals. At these contests there were more marginal Conservative seats than there were Liberal and these tended to record far higher levels of turnout, particularly the more marginal they were. Such a trend would appear to contradict the general relationship and suggests that Tory voters, and not Liberal ones, were more likely to turnout when it really mattered.

The third explanation, which stresses the consequences of low turnout in areas of party strength, is tested in Figure 7.7. This shows the average turnout in Conservative- and Liberal-held seats at each general election between 1885 and December 1910 after the two parties have been awarded equal shares of the vote. At five of the eight contests (1886 through to 1900 and January 1910) turnout was higher in Liberal-held seats than in Conservative ones, although in

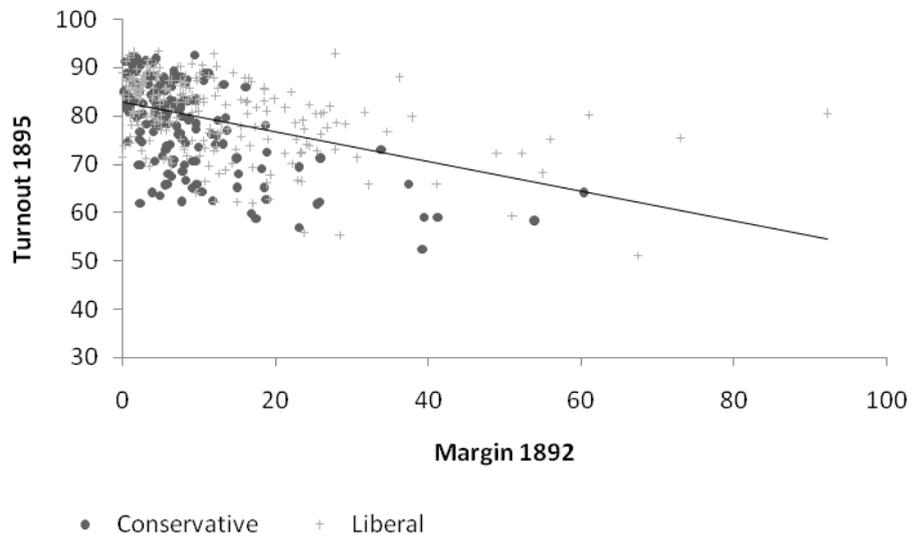
Figure 7.6 Turnout at the constituency scale according to margin of victory and winner at the previous general election



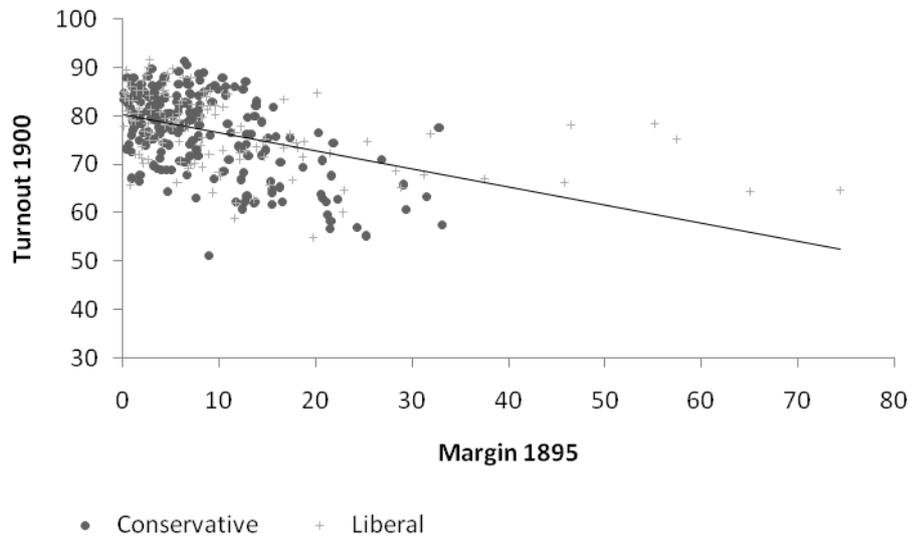
(a) Turnout in 1886 according to margin of victory and winner in 1885



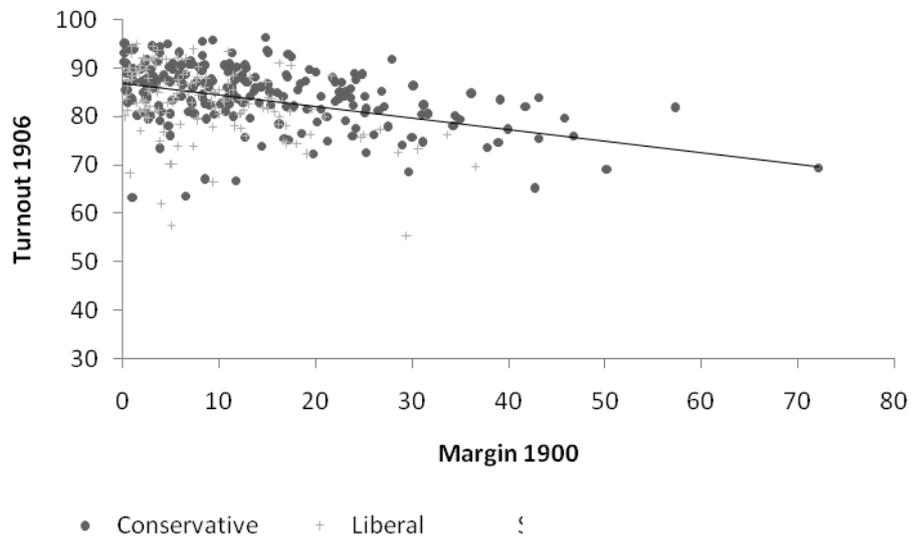
(b) Turnout in 1892 according to margin of victory and winner in 1886



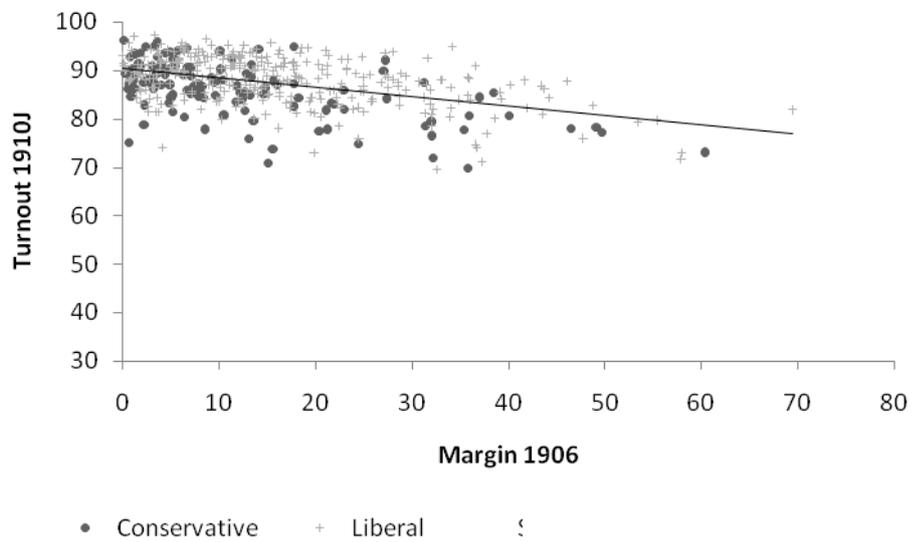
(c) Turnout in 1895 according to margin of victory and winner in 1892



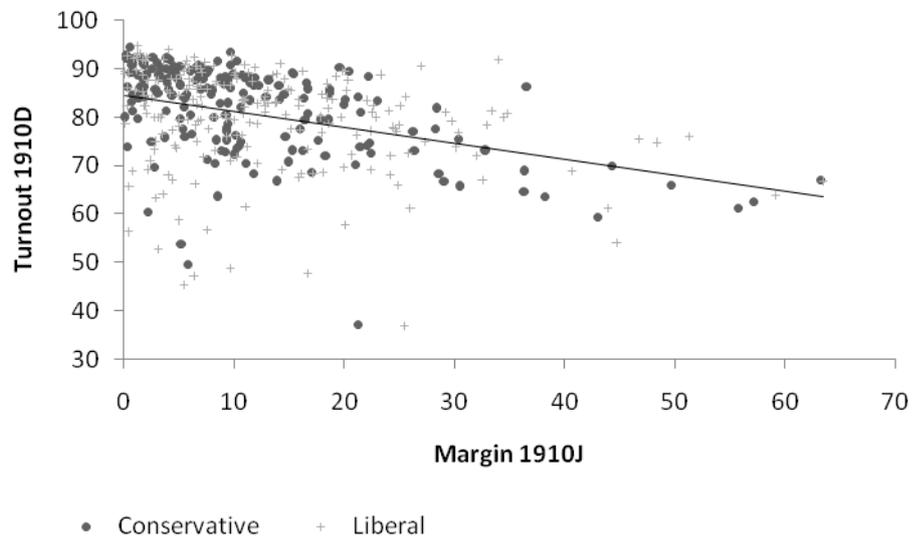
(d) Turnout in 1900 according to margin of victory and winner in 1895



(e) Turnout in 1906 according to margin of victory and winner in 1900



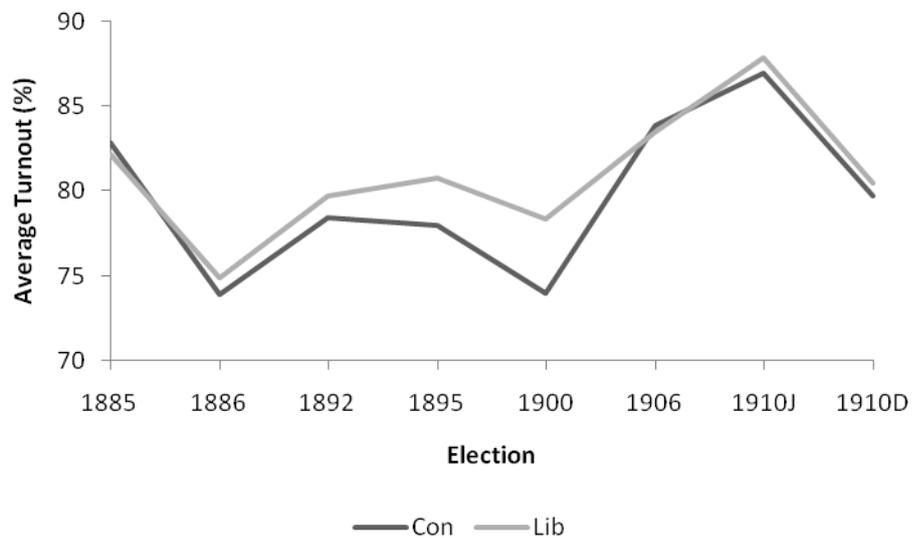
(f) Turnout in January 1910 according to margin of victory and winner in 1906



(g) Turnout in December 1910 according to margin of victory and winner in January 1910

Source: Derived from Constituency Results Database

Figure 7.7 Variations in average turnout in Conservative and Liberal-held seats, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910



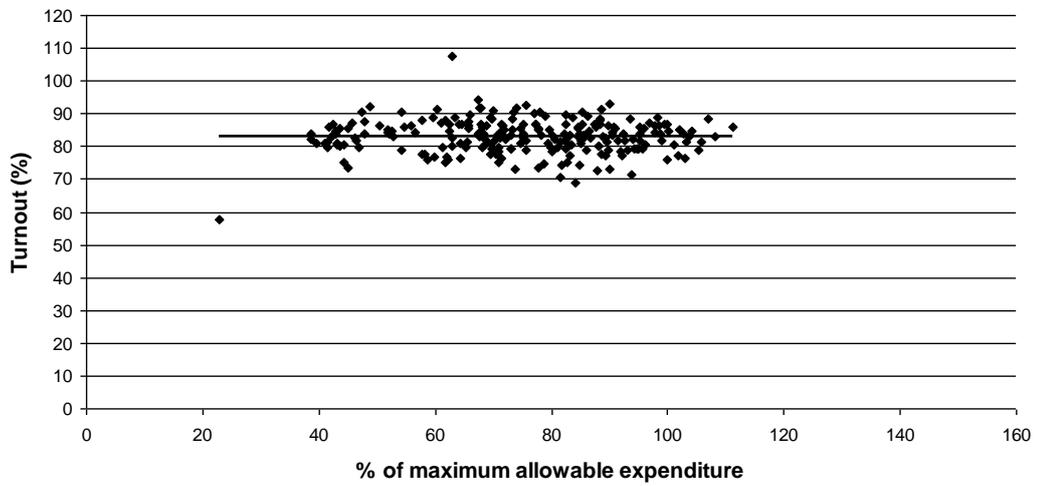
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

some cases by just a single percentage point; only in 1885 and 1906 was turnout higher in the latter. As the explanation suggests these lower levels of turnout did not necessarily work to the detriment of Conservative candidates because with a lower level of turnout in constituencies that they held, the Tories required fewer votes to win a seat. Consequently, in terms of bias, higher levels of abstentions worked in favour of the Conservatives, as indicated by Figure 7.5.¹²

Campaign expenditure also played an important role in affecting turnout levels and the impact of constituency campaigning can be seen through the effect of local canvassing efforts on voter turnout. The Third Reform Act forced parties to

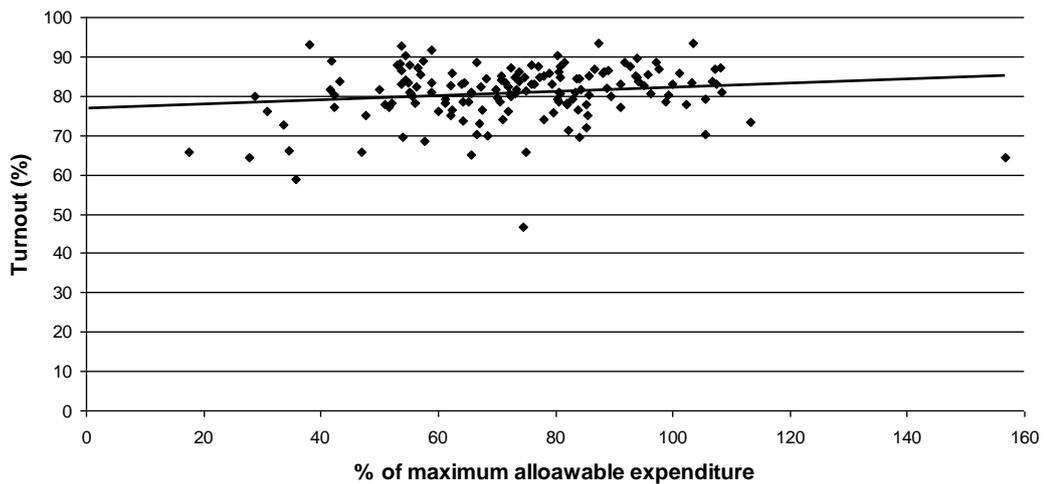
¹² Johnston et al. (2001b: 187) draw an identical conclusion for the period between 1950 and 1997, a period when Labour were favoured by this bias component.

Figure 7.8 Turnout in England and Wales according to amount spent on campaigning, 1885



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database and Election Expenditure Database

Figure 7.9 Turnout in England and Wales according to amount spent on campaigning, 1895



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database and Election Expenditure Database

reach out to the electorate more than ever before to canvass for support, with the creation of a mass electorate ensuring that candidates could no longer rely on established party loyalties and deferential voting to deliver the required votes. There is considerable evidence from post-World War Two elections that because people are more likely to vote when they have information about the contest and its participants, the more the parties try and encourage them to turn out through intensive local canvassing efforts. As a result, turnout should be highest where the parties campaign hardest.

To test whether the same relationship existed during late nineteenth-century campaigns, Figures 7.8 and 7.9 relate turnout at the 1885 and 1895 general elections respectively to the amount spent on campaigning by the winner and runner-up together for each contested constituency in England and Wales. Initially, as Figure 7.8 shows, there is no evidence of a relationship between the two variables in 1885. Irrespective of the amounts spent on local campaigning, constituency turnout levels remained between 70 and 90 per cent. In addition, as the trend line suggests, variations in campaign intensity had no impact on turnout. By 1895 however, a much stronger relationship between campaign intensity and turnout had begun to emerge (Figure 7.9). Voter turnout was much more varied across the constituencies and, more significantly, it is clear that it was higher where the parties spent the most on local canvassing.

Third Parties and the Creation of Bias

While the decision not to vote could therefore potentially have significant consequences for the electoral success of the two main parties, so too did the

decision to vote for a third party. The votes that these accrued contribute to two further sub-sources of the reactive malapportionment component, both of which are the result of differences in their strength. Third parties are defined as any party label other than that of the two main parties – Conservative and Liberal – whose vote or seat shares are being analysed. During the nineteenth century these fell into two main groupings: firstly, candidates standing on a Labour platform and, secondly, ‘other’, a category which encompassed Lib-Lab candidates in the main as well as Crofters and any other remaining individuals seeking to be elected to a Parliamentary seat. As Johnston et al. (2001b: 189) note, third parties can have precisely the same impact as abstentions on the ability of the main parties to win seats. This is because the more votes that third party candidates receive in a constituency, the smaller the number of effective votes required by one of the two main parties for victory becomes.

Consequently, third parties can have an impact on the bias measure if they are, on average, more successful in seats where one of the main parties is stronger. If third parties are successful in the seats where a main party is strong, the latter will experience a positive bias, but if the situation is reversed the opposite result will ensue.¹³ Third party votes differ from abstentions in their effect in one crucial way, however: they can win seats whereas the latter cannot.

¹³ When votes are moved between the two main parties as part of the calculation of the bias measure to be able to achieve equal vote shares, the votes for third parties are not changed. Because of this, the number of seats they may win can be more or less than in the original election results despite the fact that their vote has not changed.

As has already been noted in chapters two and four the Conservative and Liberal parties dominated the electoral landscape up until the First World War. At the election of 1885 the two won 96 per cent of the votes between them, a figure which rose to 99 per cent the following year. It was not until 1906 that their combined share of the vote fell permanently below 95 per cent, with a combined total of 89 per cent at the election of that year and a share of 90 per cent at both of the 1910 contests. This decline was caused by two factors: the gradual emergence of the Labour party as a significant 'third party' in its own right and the consolidation of support for 'other parties' such as Lib-Lab and independent candidates. Although these two party groupings attained less than five per cent of the votes between them at the first five elections after the Third Reform Act, they started to make progressively larger gains, beginning at the 1906 election (with 11 per cent of the vote) and in the two 1910 elections, where they obtained 11 and 10 per cent of the vote respectively. The majority of this increase in support came from the rising electoral fortunes of the Labour party from 1906 onwards which, having obtained an average of less than one per cent of the vote over the first five elections after 1885, saw its share rise to an average of 7.4 per cent for the final three elections up to and including the December 1910 contest. This built on the consistent, albeit small, level of support for other candidates which was maintained throughout the period, increasing from 2.4 per cent between 1885 and 1900 inclusive to three per cent thereafter.

The rising support for candidates from 'third' parties will have influenced the bias measure if it were unequally distributed between Conservative and Liberal-held seats. As chapter two notes, the third parties drew most of their support

from constituencies that were concentrated in the north of England and Wales. The electoral success of Labour candidates in the north of England was one of the main factors that sparked the decline of the Liberals in this region, to the extent that by the end of the nineteenth century Labour was the largest electoral threat to the Conservatives in this area. In Wales the development of a vibrant Labour movement among the southern coalfields, alongside an increasingly Anglican electorate in the English border regions that rallied behind the Conservatives, resulted in the retreat of Liberalism to the coastal and more rural constituencies and the creation of a similar scenario. Third parties – Labour in particular – found their electoral support predominately in borough constituencies, although official Labour candidates began to amass larger shares of the vote in county constituencies after 1900. There was a tradition of support for parties other than the Conservatives and Liberals in borough seats that predated the Third Reform Act, starting with Chartist candidates and later in the form of Lib-Lab and other candidates espousing a socialist platform, and support for Labour candidates in particular built on this.

Across Britain as a whole support for third party candidates tended to be concentrated more in Conservative rather than Liberal-held seats, as shown in Figure 7.10, which gives the average vote third party percentage of the votes cast when those parties had equal shares. Because there was not a third party candidate in all constituencies, their impact on the two main parties is shown here based on their average performance only in the seats they contested. There was only a small gap in the percentage of third party votes between the seats held by the two parties in 1885 – just two percentage points – while at the 1886 contest all the votes for candidates from other parties were cast in

Conservative-held seats. With the exception of 1906 when the gap closed to just a one per cent difference, there was generally a substantial gap in the percentage of third party votes between the seats held by the Conservatives and Liberals from the 1892 election onwards. This averaged 16 percentage points over the next six elections, although it was as large as 21 points in 1895 and 31 in December 1910. The closure of the gap between the two parties in both 1900 and 1906 is indicative of a short-term increase in the support of third party candidates in Liberal-held seats, and a corresponding decline in Conservative-held ones, at these elections.

Figure 7.10 Average vote for third party candidates, where there was one, in Conservative and Liberal-held seats, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910

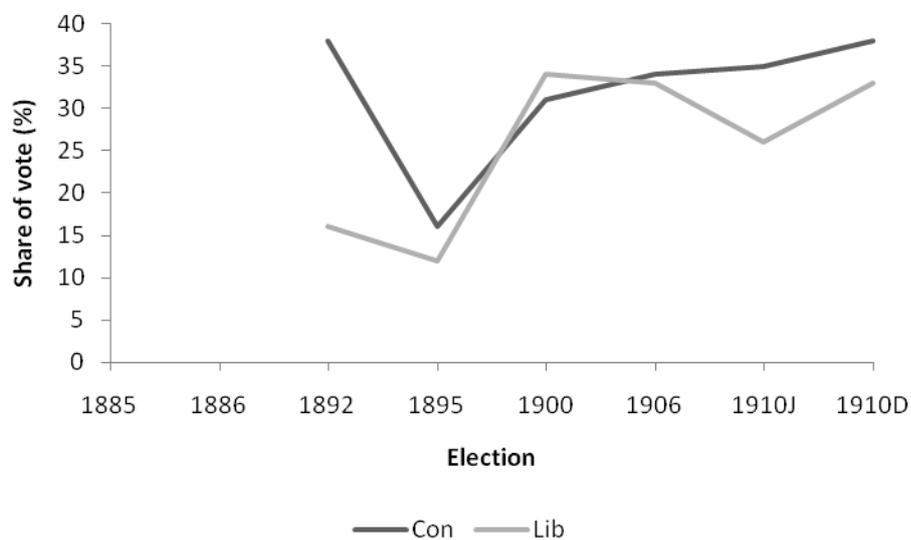


Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Whereas the other parties were successful at winning votes mainly in Conservative rather than Liberal-held seats, Labour candidates generally

performed equally well in both types of constituency (Figure 7.11). This was not initially the case: in 1885 all the votes for Labour contenders were concentrated in Liberal-held seats and in 1886 no one representing the ‘party’ stood for election. The 1892 election saw a substantial gap in the percentage of Labour votes between the seats held by the two main parties – some 22 percentage points – but at subsequent contests it closed so that the pattern of support in Conservative-held seats was broadly the same as in those of the Liberals, although it was slightly less in the latter.

Figure 7.11 Average Labour vote where there was a Labour candidate in Conservative- and Liberal-held seats, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910

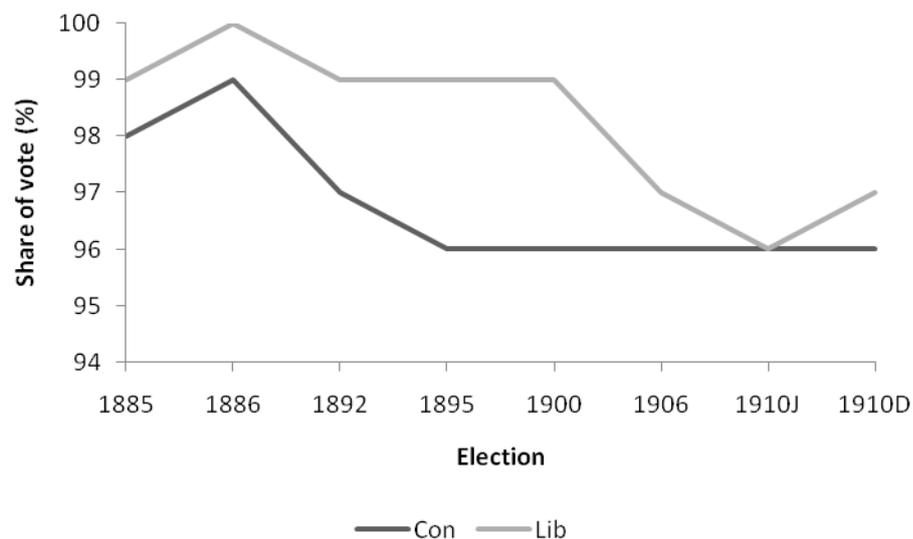


Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Overall, then, by putting the performance of the third party and Labour candidates together, it is possible to see that non-main party candidates had more of an impact in Conservative-held seats. Although there was little

difference in the distribution of support for Labour candidates, particularly after 1895, between seats held by either the Conservatives or the Liberals, third parties held a significant advantage in the former. This is confirmed in Figure 7.12, which shows the average percentage of all votes cast in Conservative and Liberal-held seats (with equal vote shares) won by the two main parties combined. Throughout the period between 1885 and December 1910 (with the exception of the January 1910 contest), third parties performed best in Conservative-held seats, although the gap between the two main parties was never large, varying between just one to three percentage points throughout the period.

Figure 7.12 Average percentage of all votes cast won by the Conservative and Liberal parties combined in Conservative- and Liberal-held seats, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910



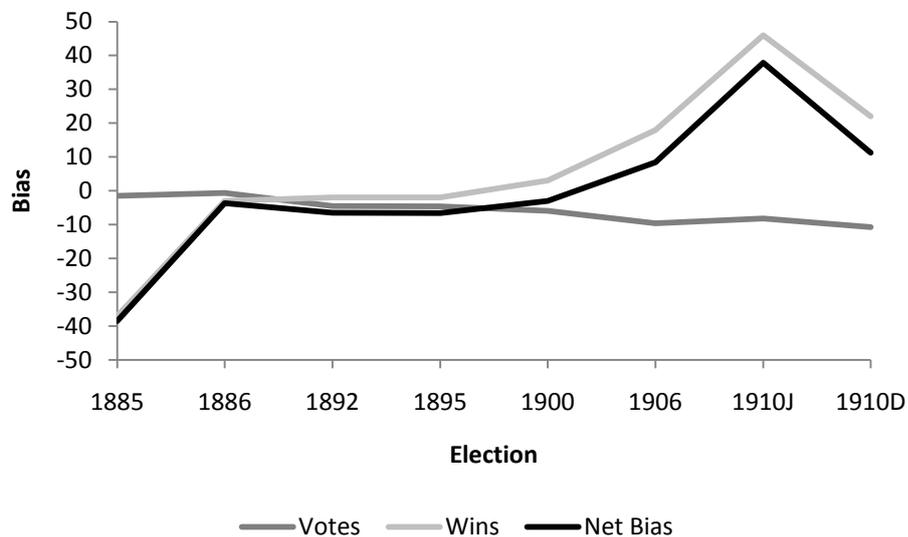
Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

The Conservatives would be expected to benefit the most from the concentration of third party support in its areas of strength, both in terms of seats:votes ratios (because the larger the amount of support for third parties in a constituency they won, the smaller the number of effective votes that are required for victory) and the direction of bias. Figure 7.13 confirms this was indeed the case, showing a pro-Conservative bias for the third party votes component (again, a negative figure indicates a bias towards the Conservative party whereas a positive value indicates a pro-Liberal bias) at each of the eight general elections from 1885 onwards. Accounting for only two and one seats in 1885 and 1886 respectively its contributions increased thereafter, with the Conservative party advantage at its greatest in December 1910 when it was worth 11 seats. Overall, therefore, it is possible to see how when third parties reduced the number of votes needed to win in a constituency this was, at each of the eight contests from 1885 onwards, to the Conservatives' advantage.

Third parties can do more than just win votes, however – they can also win seats. If they tended to perform better on average in Conservative-held seats it would be reasonable to expect that most of the seats they win would be at the expense of the former. As Johnston et al. (2001b: 192) point out, '[t]hird parties bring substantial advantages where they perform relatively well, but the threat of disadvantages if they do too well – and win!'. The number of seats that would have been won by either Labour candidates or those representing other party groupings from each of the Conservative and Liberal parties which held them after the previous election, if they had equal vote shares, is shown in Figure 7.14. The number of third party victories would have been relatively small in the context of the number of Parliamentary seats available. At the four elections

after 1886 only a very small number of seats would have switched hands away from either of the two main parties, the largest number being seven in 1892. Between 1906 and December 1910 there was increase in the number changing hands, never less than 15, as in December 1910, through to a maximum of 40 in 1906.

Figure 7.13 The third party bias component: votes, wins and net bias, with equal vote shares, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

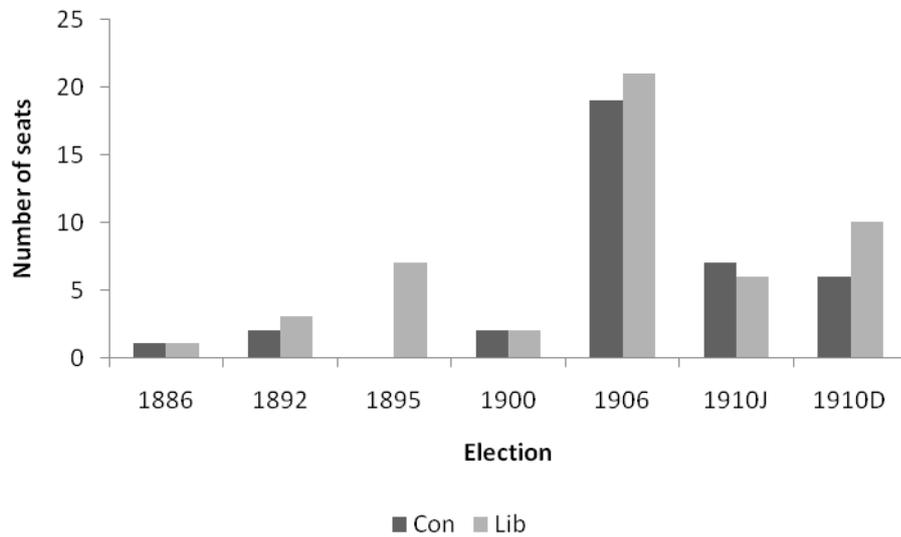
Up to and including the general election of 1900 more third party victories would have been at the expense of the Liberals than the Conservatives. At the 1895 contest, for example, they would have taken seven from the Liberals but none from the Conservatives. Consequently, third party victories operated to the advantage of the Conservatives until 1906, producing a substantial pro-Conservative bias of 37 seats in 1885 and of three, two and two at the following three elections (Figure 7.13 – the third party wins component). Figure 7.14

indicates, however, that there was a reversal in the direction of bias from the 1900 contest onwards to a position where the Liberals became the beneficiaries although only at one of these elections did third party candidates win more seats at the expense of the Conservatives rather than the Liberals (January 1910). The reason for this is counterintuitive situation, one which coincided with the upturn in support for Labour candidates, is shown in Figure 7.15. Although third parties commonly won more seats from Liberal rather than Conservative incumbents, this growth in support also led to an increasing number of Labour MPs who were incumbents. Rather than maintaining a relatively stable base of support, the Labour party was adding to gains it had already made, with its share of all MPs progressively increasing. As a result many contests from 1900 onwards were essentially two-party contests between candidates from the Conservative and Labour parties, and seats that were acquired from Conservative incumbents resulted in a boost to the pro-Liberal bias. This was worth 3 seats in 1900 to the Liberals, rising to 18 in 1906 and peaking at 46 at the January 1910 election, although it did fall to 22 at the following contest. Collectively, the net impact of the two third party bias components saw that the advantage shifted over time from the Conservatives to the Liberals (Figure 7.13). In broad terms the net trend mirrored that of the third party wins component, minus the effect of the third party votes component.

Summary

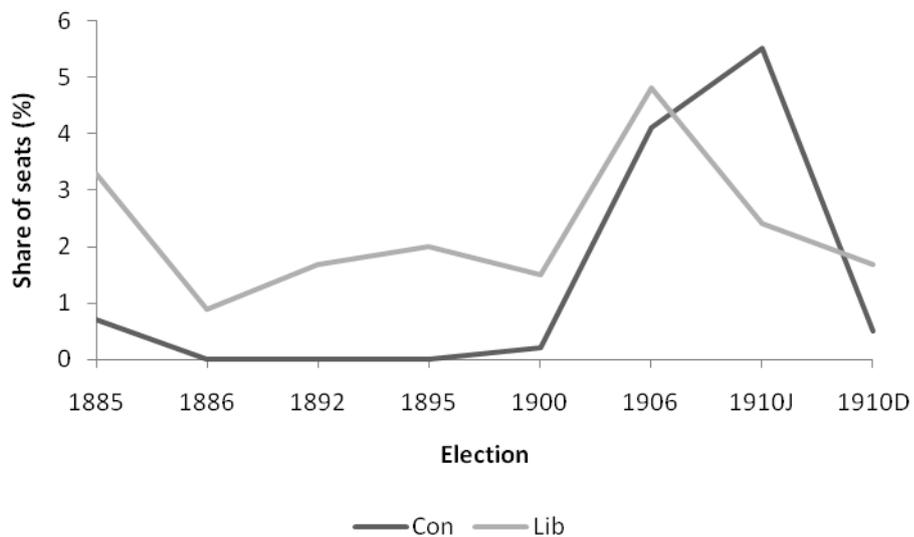
This chapter has examined the final bias component of reactive

Figure 7.14 Number of 'other' party victories from Conservative and Liberal incumbents, with equal vote shares, 1886-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

Figure 7.15 Share of seats won by Labour candidates from Conservative and Liberal incumbents, 1885-December 1910



Source: Calculated from Constituency Results Database

malapportionment. Issues of turnout and the impact of third parties have been neglected in studies of the nineteenth century electoral system, with focus instead being placed on the extension of the franchise, reflecting its centrality in the nineteenth century electoral reforms. Following each piece of reform legislation the electorate grew rapidly so that by December 1910 it was both substantially larger and more socially diverse than during the period before 1832. While quantitatively the increase was very large the franchise reforms only really helped the size of the electorate keep pace with population growth, at least until the passage of the Third Reform Act. Although it kept pace the electorate was only a reasonably small proportion of the population and, more specifically since it was a right that could be held only by men, of the adult male population. Many people were excluded, some deliberately – for reasons of gender, for instance – others ‘accidentally’ because of how the electoral registration system operated, and others still because of political calculation. It is therefore apparent that although the size of the electorate grew over the course of the nineteenth century it was remained far from representative of society, both numerically or in its composition.

It is also clear that not everyone who was able to vote chose to do so. That said, turnout grew over time to levels that were in excess of those recorded at elections since World War Two, a period when falling rates of political participation have fuelled debates about the health of democracy in Britain. Those who did abstain, however, contributed to the final bias component, that is reactive malapportionment. As the number of non-voters increased in a constituency so the quantity of votes required for victory there declined, reducing the number for the two parties to fight over. During the period between

1886 and 1900 and again at the general election of December 1910 the Conservatives rather than the Liberals were the main beneficiaries of this. Whereas the Liberals gained from the general geography of votes, Tory voters were usually more likely to vote when the seat was particularly marginal, although for both parties there is a clear correlation between voter turnout and campaign intensity (measured by the amounts spent on a campaign), suggesting once again the emergence of an electoral system where what parties spend affects their performance – a system where who spends wins.

Votes for third parties had a very similar impact to abstentions, reducing the number of votes available to the two main parties. As with the former, the Conservatives were the net beneficiaries of votes for and victories by third parties, at least until the 1906 general election. The bias they derived from these was broadly similar in terms of the number of seats as from abstentions, effectively doubling the Conservative advantage. At the final three elections, however, the direction of the bias reversed to favour the Liberals, as significantly so, easily cancelling out any that the Conservatives derived from abstentions and swinging the reactive malapportionment bias as a whole towards the Liberals. Ultimately, these three examples all show that the decision not to vote – either literally or by casting a vote for a third party – had important consequences for the electoral performance of the two main parties.

Conclusion

Bias in the Nineteenth-Century Electoral System

Using the ideas and concepts developed in contemporary studies of the electoral geography of Britain and the operation of the British electoral system since 1945, this thesis has focused on three main interlinking themes: the electoral landscape of the nineteenth century, disproportionality and bias in the electoral system and the geographies of campaign expenditure. This conclusion will summarise the main findings, consider the limitations of the study and seek to link it to wider arguments about the development of a modern electoral system in Britain.

Summary

The first three chapters provided an overview of the electoral landscape of nineteenth-century Britain at different scales, ranging from the national to the local. Chapter one argued that over the course of the long nineteenth century – from 1832 to December 1910 – there were two key developments in the electoral politics of Britain. The first of these was the progressive erosion of the Liberals' electoral dominance by the Conservatives, particularly after the 1860s. This fundamentally changed the electoral landscape after a period during which the latter party had been unelectable because of internal dissention over the Corn Laws. However, a collection of broader social and economic events

combined with the development and modernisation of party organisations, a concerted effort to court the new middle-class vote and the use of patriotic narratives in electioneering, all combined to help the Conservatives nationally to achieve a 22 per cent swing in their favour between the first general election after the 1832 Reform Act and the last before World War One. The second key development was the growth in support for ‘third parties’, in particular for Labour candidates after 1895. Just as the Conservatives had taken advantage of the inability of the Liberals to respond to the new social composition of the electorate and, more broadly, the changing social and economic circumstances of the country, so the Labour movement grew in strength because of the failure of the two main parties to address specifically working-class issues.

The second chapter emphasised how these long-term trends were related to a distinctive regional and local geography. Focusing purely on the period after 1885, when the use of single-member constituencies makes analysis of constituency-level results much easier to carry out, it showed how what was happening nationally resulted in the development of a very distinctive regional geography of voting in Britain. As the Liberal’s electoral performance weakened their support became increasingly concentrated in the more geographically peripheral regions of Britain – Scotland, Wales and, in England, the North, South West and Yorkshire. In contrast, the Conservative resurgence was the result of the consolidation of their dominance in the South East and a growth in support in the industrial areas of the North West and West Midlands. England was, then, very much the battleground area between these two parties and as the geography of uncontested constituencies indicated it was in the borough

constituencies that the battle for electoral dominance between them was principally fought.

The third chapter focused on how the competition between the Conservatives and the Liberals and their respective geographies of support combined to produce disproportional outcomes. Although the Third Reform Act in particular sought to make Parliament more representative of the distribution of the population, it is clear that the way the British electoral system operated and how it translated votes into seats resulted in increasingly unrepresentative outcomes during the later stages of the nineteenth century. Using a range of different indicators, the chapter showed that election outcomes were disproportional, and increasingly so, at every general election from 1837 onwards, and also that the electoral system first favoured the Conservatives before performing an about turn after 1900 so that the Liberals gained an advantage. There were also important geographical variations in disproportionality, with the Liberals consistently being better over-represented in Scotland and Wales – two of their ‘heartland’ areas – and also in the north of England, a factor which led to them benefitting more than the Conservatives from the operation of the electoral system at the final three general elections of the period.

Clearly, then, the two main parties were treated unequally by the electoral system: at any one election either the Conservatives or the Liberals received a better return on their votes than the other party, receiving more seats than they would have been entitled to if a system of proportional representation had been in use. However, the analytical indicators used in chapter three (e.g. the index of disproportionality) all make one key assumption, namely that the parties were treated equally by the electoral system when they received a particular share of

the vote. The later chapters of this thesis argued that this was not the situation and, instead, it was actually the case that the geographical processes responsible for creating the disproportional outcomes also produced biased results which resulted in one of the main parties benefitting more than the other. In order to examine this a measure of bias first outlined by Brookes (1959, 1960), and subsequently modified and widely applied to analyse post-1945 election results and redistricting processes in both the United Kingdom and the United States by Johnston, Pattie and others (e.g. Johnston et al., 2001b), has been used. As Johnston et al. (2001b: 200) state, this asks a very simple question: 'given the relative geography of support for each party across the map of constituencies, what would the election result have been if each had obtained the same share of the votes cast?'. This thesis is the first time that this measure has been applied to the post-Third Reform Act period, and the process involves shifting votes uniformly from one of the main parties to the other across all constituencies so that they have equal shares of the two-party vote; votes for 'third' parties are left untouched. Although it assumes that there was a uniform swing across all constituencies, as the second section of chapter three showed, it does provide a clear insight into how the electoral system was biased in its treatment of the two main parties – in both 1885 and 1886, for example, if the Conservatives and the Liberals had had an equal share of the vote, the former would have had 31 more seats than the latter.

The explanation for why one party fared better than the other at an election if they shared their vote total equally, assuming a uniform swing, lies in the role played by geography, specifically the geography of voting for the two main parties across the map of constituencies. Chapter four summarised how this

can combine hypothetically with two specific spatial processes – gerrymandering and malapportionment – to create bias. The process through which it arises is explicitly geographical, involving the geography of constituency boundaries and their sizes, the spatial distribution of support for the competing parties and the geography of abstentions. A particular advantage of the bias measure outlined by Brookes is that it can be broken down into its six main source components. Malapportionment-like effects are directly produced by variations in National Electoral Quotas and differences in the sizes of individual constituencies, while the equivalent of malapportionment outcomes – termed ‘reactive malapportionment’ are produced by other aspects of the electoral system such as ‘third party’ votes and the geography and quantity of abstentions; finally, an effect similar to the deliberate act of gerrymandering is produced by the differential geographies of support for the two main parties.

Chapters four through to seven outlined first the size of both the overall bias and then the contribution each of these individual components made to it at every general election between 1885 and December 1910. All of these sources of bias were present in nineteenth century Britain and played a role in influencing both the amount and direction of bias. Several key discoveries stand out. Firstly, the trends in the both the gross and net volumes of bias were broadly identical. The former was substantially higher from 1906 onwards than it was at the start of the period, increasing from 80 seats in 1885 to a high point of 165 in 1906 (although its lowest levels were in 1886 and it declined slightly at the two general elections of 1910), while the latter accounted for between 20 and 40 seats at the first five general elections before rising to over 100 by December 1910. Secondly, despite the constituency system being unchanged over the

entire 25-year period, the gross volume of bias towards each of the two main parties was increasingly divergent. The Conservatives experienced an overall decline from 70 seats in 1885 to 21 in December 1910. In contrast, there was a substantial increase in the Liberal volume from just nine and five seats respectively at the first two elections of the period to over 120 from 1906 onwards, including a peak figure of 143 in January 1910. Third, over the eight general elections the relative importance of the gerrymander component increased from contributing virtually nothing to the overall bias to being the largest single contributor. This came at the expense of both the reactive malapportionment and, particularly, the malapportionment components. Finally, whereas the net beneficiary of these biases was the Conservative party at the first two general elections, from 1892 onwards the Liberals were the beneficiaries and to a significantly greater extent than the Tories. Putting these findings together with those of these three chapters one key finding stands out: while the Conservatives may have gradually grown in strength after the 1860s so that they were on a par with the Liberals in terms of their share of the national popular vote, the process through which the electoral system translated votes into seats was biased in favour of the Liberals with the effect that they won more seats than they should have.

Chapters five through seven explored the reasons for these conclusions through in-depth examinations of the three sets of bias components. The impact of variations in constituency sizes at both national scale and within the constituent nations of Britain was examined in chapter five. These produce malapportionment-like biases if the support for a party is concentrated in areas or Parliamentary seats where electorates are smaller, a situation which can

either be deliberately created or because of a failure to regularly review constituency boundaries meant that they did not keep pace changes in the population geography of the country. Unequal constituency sizes were common in nineteenth-century Britain, with English constituencies typically being larger than their Scottish and Welsh counterparts because of the operation of implicit national electoral quotas; this bias component consistently favoured the Liberals, although only by a handful of seats, because a significant proportion of their electoral support was concentrated in areas where constituency electorates were smaller. Much larger variations in constituency sizes were to be seen within the constituent nations of Britain. The rural to urban population transition over the course of the nineteenth century combined with a failure to review the map of Parliamentary constituencies after 1885 and the lack of a non-partisan system of defining boundaries to produce increasingly unequal constituency electorates, especially in England and Wales and with a clear difference between urban and rural areas. This sub-source of bias made a much larger contribution to the overall bias than national electoral quotas did but, in contrast, fluctuated much more and sometimes favoured the Conservatives and other times the Liberals.

The gerrymander (or efficiency) bias component can result from one or a combination of two processes. Firstly, because the geographies of support for the two main parties differ, with the votes for one more efficiently distributed across the constituencies than is the case for the other one; and, secondly, because the parties may be able to influence the process through which constituency boundaries are drawn-up so that they can achieve a more efficient distribution of their votes compared to their rivals. Here the key issue, as

chapter six demonstrated, is not how many votes a party receives but rather where it wins them. Apart from at the 1886 general election the Liberals were the only benefactor from the gerrymander component, with the volume of bias they benefitted from peaking at 101 seats in 1906 – this component was the largest single contributor to the pro-Liberal net bias after the 1892 general election.

This advantage was the result of the Conservative's votes being less efficiently distributed geographically than those of the Liberals. An important distinction can be drawn between effective, surplus and wasted votes here since one way for a party to benefit from the gerrymander component is to focus its votes where it can win. Fewer votes for the Tories were effective – that is they contributed to winning a seat – compared to the Liberals, while they also accrued more wasted votes – those that bring no reward such as winning a seat – since the latter tended to win by small majorities. This was the result of the increasing geographical concentration of electoral support for the Liberals and the difficulties the Conservatives experienced in trying to win seats outside of their southern England heartland areas, as outlined in chapter two. Politicians played a key role in this process when they decided on the allocation of the new Parliamentary seats as part of the Third Reform Act. Even though there was no concerted and widespread attempt at infrastructural gerrymandering, many of these were placed in areas of Liberal strength with the result that the Tories would need to break out of their traditional areas of strength to win them.

A further factor which complicated the distribution of votes was shown to be the increasing sophistication of electoral campaign expenditure practices during the late nineteenth century. Until the enactment of the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal

Practices Act constituency campaigns were commonly corrupt and resulted in large scale expenditures by candidates; despite the passage of several pieces of legislation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was no decline either the frequency of illegal practices or the amounts spent trying to win election or defend a seat. However, after 1883 there were several important changes. First, not only did the overall sums spent during general election campaigns decline significantly, but candidates became more efficient and rational in terms of how money was expended and what it was used for. In particular there was a transition, especially by Liberal candidates, away from public forms of electioneering towards more disciplined, print-based campaigns.

This was accompanied by an increasing tendency towards geographical targeting at general elections during this period – this meant that the more marginal constituencies tended to see the highest levels of campaign expenditure in the hope that spending more would influence the results. Once again the Liberals led developments in this area, as they directed their efforts towards defending the seats they already held and the most marginal Conservative ones. The outcome of these tendencies was that expenditure made a much greater impact on constituency contests, both in terms of the performance of a candidate in the popular vote and encouraging greater voter turnout, something which chapter seven considered.

Chapter seven's main focus was on the reactive malapportionment component. This can have the same outcome as malapportionment (one party benefits because it is electorally stronger in the constituencies where fewer effective votes are required for victory) but can be divided into two main sub-sources: abstentions and the impact of third parties. Firstly, in terms of the

former, as the number of non-voters increased in a constituency so the quantity of votes required for victory declined, increasing the seats:votes ratio return to the party strongest in the constituencies where levels of turnout were lowest. During the period between 1886 and 1900 and again at the general election of December 1910 the Conservatives were the main beneficiaries of this.

Secondly, there is the impact of third parties, a term that has been used in this thesis to refer to all parties other than the Conservatives and Liberals. Although Chartist candidates could be found in some areas of Britain during the 1840s, as chapter one outlined there was no sustained third party presence until over 50 years later and the emergence of the Labour party. The votes that these candidates accrued had an impact identical to that of abstentions: a reduction in the number of votes needed for victory by one of the other two parties; consequently, if the votes won by third parties are concentrated in constituencies where one of the two main parties is the stronger, then that party will benefit in an identical manner to how it would from abstentions – a larger seats:votes ratio than its opponents. As chapter seven showed, the Conservatives were the net beneficiaries of votes for and victories by third parties, at least until the 1906 general election. The bias they derived from these two sub-sources was broadly similar in terms of the number of seats as from abstentions, effectively doubling the benefit they derived from this component. At the final three elections, however, the direction of the bias reversed so as to significantly favour the Liberals, a movement which more than cancelled out any advantage the Conservatives continued to derive from abstentions.

Potential Further Research on Nineteenth-Century Electoral Geography

This research has offered a thorough analysis of the historical peculiarities of bias in the British electoral system. Inevitably, however, there is scope for further investigation in certain areas. Firstly, the time period could be extended forward from its present end point in December 1910 to take in general elections during the interwar and immediate postwar period, an era which has yet to be analysed in this way; this would allow this study to link up with work on bias that presently starts in 1950. This would also enable a close analysis of the operation of the electoral system as it witnessed the rise of the Labour party and the development of the three party system in Britain. An analysis of bias during this period could reveal how distinctive a geography of voter support existed for the Labour party, showing once again – or not – the significance of regional differences in the process of turning votes into seats. However, there would be a key difficulty with applying the same methodological approach to a time which saw three parties rather than two actively contesting each election, and doing so to a greater extent than during the postwar period (see Rallings and Thrasher, 2000: 70). A further way of extending the research would be to include southern Ireland up until its succession from Britain. This would allow for a more complete picture of the competition between the two main parties.

There have also been some difficulties during the research caused by electoral peculiarities specific to the pre-1945 period, such as the relatively high number of uncontested constituencies (particularly before the Third Reform Act) and a number of constituencies which returned more than one member of Parliament. While these were perfectly normal characteristics of the time and

often reflected localised party dominance or simply a customary practice in the electoral system, they do complicate the quantitative examination of the results of the period and mean that certain constituencies have to be omitted in the overall analysis. One potential workaround for the problem of uncontested constituencies is to attempt to calculate the likely result in each one by applying either the national or the relevant regional swing to the result at the previous general election, although this assumes that it was contested then which was not always the case. There is no easy workaround for the issue of multi-member constituencies – their presence just has to be accepted as an integral part of the electoral system.

Much more work could also be undertaken using the Parliamentary election expenditure returns which remain an extremely under used source. This thesis has only used the data from county seats at four general elections when figures are available for every candidate at each general election after 1885 in all types of constituency across Britain. Clearly it would possible to obtain a much more in-depth picture of what campaign funds were spent on, where they were spent and the effectiveness of this expenditure on levels of turnout and its influence on electoral outcomes. These returns also include detailed information on the amounts spent by Returning Officers, individuals who were essential to the organisation and conduct of elections, but who have largely been ignored in studies of the nineteenth century.

The Development of a Modern Electoral System?

Collectively, the findings of this thesis suggest that the notion of Britain as a democratising nation needs to be revisited, at least with respect to the operation of its electoral system. The dominant narrative in the political and electoral historiography of the democratisation of nineteenth-century Britain remains one which is focused around the importance of the extension of the franchise and the resultant growth of the electorate, the implementation of single-member constituencies and the redistribution of seats, and the introduction of anti-corruption measures such as the secret ballot. While these undoubtedly aided the development of a more democratic political system, as this thesis has shown the electoral system itself still produced outcomes that were disproportional, biased and beginning to be manipulated by the major political parties. Indeed, the first two of these only increased over the course of the eight general elections between 1885 and December 1910.

Although the Conservatives progressively eroded the electoral dominance of the Liberals over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Liberals remained the larger party of the two in terms of the number of seats they held because they were better rewarded by the process of translating votes into seats than they should have been. Geography played a key role in this, with contributions to the overall Liberal bias after 1886 from all but one of the six sub-sources. The Liberals derived their largest advantage from the more efficient geography of their support, but also benefited from differences in the sizes of constituency electorates, the geography of the allocation of new Parliamentary seats, the criteria used to draw up constituency boundaries and,

eventually, the votes cast for third parties. In addition, the emerging geographies of campaign expenditure would also suggest that Liberal candidates were beginning to be able to influence and manipulate the geography of vote. Any benefits the Tories derived from the abstentions and, at times, constituency size variation sub-components, were in comparison very small. Although Britain had taken significant steps towards reforming its electoral system these did not necessarily aim to develop it into one which produced proportional outcomes since political considerations remained at the forefront of much reform legislation. There was clearly still much more that could be done – more regular, non-partisan reviews of constituency electorates to ensure greater equality, for example – but there was little political will to do so. As Garrard (2002) suggests the development of the British democratic system needs to be seen as more of an ongoing project, rather than one which was completed following the reforms of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is worth bearing in mind that there is still much more that could be done to make election outcomes more proportional in Britain, as the continuing of bias at post-1945 general elections testifies.

If this thesis raises questions about the increasing democratisation of Britain during this time, it does shed light on the more general process of modernisation in the country during the nineteenth century and places electoral change and party politics into the wider context of an important shift towards more regulation and standardisation in public life and in public spaces. By 1910 Britain had an electoral system in which there were clear legislative requirements and standards, dictating, for example, how much candidates could spend on their campaigns and political parties were behaving in a much more

strategic manner in their approach to participating in elections. While this was a haphazard process in some respects, the period did witness a general trend towards a more regulated political system with more strategically orientated and better organised parties working within it. Ironically, then, although the persistence of bias can be used as evidence to challenge notions of increased democratic representation, it can also be used, particularly with respect to the impact of campaign expenditure on electoral outcomes, to demonstrate this move towards a more modern system with stricter rules and savvier players. Consequently, perhaps the story of the nineteenth-century electoral system in Britain is more one of modernisation than democratisation.

Appendix A

Sample from Constituency Results Database

Sample from the database recording the results of the 1900 general election.

ID No	Ref	Constituency Name	Constituency Type	Country	County	Region	Quartile	Members	Contested	Electorate	Est. Electorate	Cand 1 Party	Cand 1 Votes	Cand 2 Party	Cand 2 Votes
1	1	Battersea & Clapham, Battersea	Borough	England	Surrey	se	4	1	Yes	14420	14420	L/Lab	5860	C	5606
2	2	Battersea & Clapham, Clapham	Borough	England	Surrey	se	4	1	Yes	16572	16572	C	7504	L	3084
3	3	Bethnal Green, North-East	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8012	8012	C	2988	L	2609
4	4	Bethnal Green, South-West	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8128	8128	C	2862	L	2514
5	5	Camberwell, Dulwich	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	No	Not Given	12760	C			
6	6	Camberwell, North	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	Yes	12397	12397	L	4820	C	3485
7	7	Camberwell, Peckham	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	Yes	11835	11835	C	4453	L	3061
8	8	Chelsea	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	3	1	Yes	12736	12736	C	4637	L	3306
9	9	City of London	Borough	England	City of London	se	4	2	No	Not stated	35997	C		C	
10	10	Deptford	Borough	England	Kent	se	4	1	Yes	15000	15000	C	6236	L/Lab	3806
11	11	Finsbury, Central	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8523	8523	C	2782	L	2523
12	12	Finsbury, East	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	5678	5678	C	2174	L	1827
13	13	Finsbury, Holborn	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	4	1	No	Not stated	13460	C			
14	14	Fulham	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	4	1	Yes	16600	16600	C	6541	L	4247
15	15	Greenwich	Borough	England	Kent	se	3	1	Yes	12247	12247	C	5454	L	3484
16	16	Hackney, Central	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8692	8692	C	3747	L	2243
17	17	Hackney, North	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	3	1	Yes	11747	11747	C	5005	L	2437
18	18	Hackney, South	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	4	1	Yes	13146	13146	C	4714	L	4376
19	19	Hammersmith	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	4	1	Yes	13064	13064	C	5458	L	2166
20	20	Hampstead	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	No	Not stated	9116	C			
21	21	Islington, East	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	3	1	Yes	10395	10395	C	4205	L	2586
22	22	Islington, North	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	3	1	Yes	11964	11964	C	4881	L	2567
23	23	Islington, South	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8796	8796	C	3881	L	1665
24	24	Islington, West	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	9074	9074	L	3178	LU	3159
25	25	Kensington, North	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	9323	9323	C	3257	L	2527
26	26	Kensington, South	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	No	Not stated	9618	C			
27	27	Lambeth, Brixton	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	No	Not stated	10939	C			
28	28	Lambeth, Kennington	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	Yes	10432	10432	C	4195	L	2309
29	29	Lambeth, North	Borough	England	Surrey	se	1	1	Yes	7090	7090	C	2677	L	1795
30	30	Lambeth, Norwood	Borough	England	Surrey	se	2	1	No	Not stated	9791	C			
31	31	Lewisham	Borough	England	Kent	se	4	1	No	Not stated	13042	C			
32	32	Marylebone, East	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	6972	6972	C	3106	L	1126
33	33	Marylebone, West	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8792	8792	C	3487	L	1532
34	34	Newington, Walworth	Borough	England	Surrey	se	2	1	Yes	7770	7770	C	3098	L	2233
35	35	Newington, West	Borough	England	Surrey	se	2	1	Yes	8491	8491	L	3559	C	2403
36	36	Paddington, North	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	8197	8197	C	3364	L	1518
37	37	Paddington, South	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	No	Not stated	6241	C			
38	38	St. George, Hanover Square	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	9820	9820	C	3852	L	1278
39	39	St. Pancras, East	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	7248	7248	C	3016	L	2106
40	40	St. Pancras, North	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	7582	7582	C	3056	L	2345
41	41	St. Pancras, South	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	5894	5894	LU	2273	L	1113
42	42	St. Pancras, West	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	7431	7431	C	3220	L	1553
43	43	Shoreditch, Haggerston	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	6781	6781	L/Lab	2290	C	2266
44	44	Shoreditch, Hoxton	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	2	1	Yes	7789	7789	C	2866	L	2595
45	45	Southwark, Bermondsey	Borough	England	Surrey	se	3	1	Yes	11211	11211	C	4017	L	3717
46	46	Southwark, Rotherhithe	Borough	England	Surrey	se	2	1	Yes	9559	9559	C	3938	L	2356
47	47	Southwark, West	Borough	England	Surrey	se	2	1	Yes	7945	7945	L	2893	C	2763
48	48	Strand	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	4	1	No	Not stated	13537	C			
49	49	Tower Hamlets, Bow and Bromley	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	3	1	Yes	11278	11278	C	4403	Lab	2558
50	50	Tower Hamlets, Limehouse	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	6835	6835	C	2608	L	2070
51	51	Tower Hamlets, Mile End	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	5915	5915	C	2440	L	1280
52	52	Tower Hamlets, Poplar	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	11009	11009	L	3992	C	2840
53	53	Tower Hamlets, St. George	Borough	England	Middlesex	se	1	1	Yes	3518	3518	C	1437	L	1141

Appendix B

Sample from Election Expenditure Database

Sample from the campaign expenditure returns for the 1895 general election.

REF	SEATNAME	REGION	DISTRICTS	STATIONS	MAXEXPEND	DATE	REASON	CONTEST	NOMIN	RETURNED	ELECTORATE
90	Bedfordshire; North/Biggleswade	ea	28	35	1370	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	13744
91	Bedfordshire; South/Luton	ea	23	29	1310	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	12760
92	Berkshire; North/Abingdon	se	19	23	1070	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	8615
93	Berkshire; South/Newbury	se	23	27	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10621
94	Berkshire; East/Wokingham	se	0	0	1190	7/1895	11	N	1	1	10722
95	Buckinghamshire; North/Buckingham	se	34	36	1250	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	11395
96	Buckinghamshire; Mid/Aylesbury	se	0	0	1190	7/1895	11	N	1	1	10999
97	Buckinghamshire; South/Wycombe	se	0	0	1310	7/1895	11	N	1	1	12197
98	Cambridgeshire; North/Wisbeach	ea	24	31	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10495
99	Cambridgeshire; West/Chesterton	ea	30	33	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10651
100	Cambridgeshire; East/Newmarket	ea	22	26	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9738
101	Cheshire; Wirral	nw	0	0	1310	7/1895	11	N	1	1	12512
102	Cheshire; Eddisbury	nw	24	26	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10262
103	Cheshire; Macclesfield	nw	0	0	1070	7/1895	11	N	1	1	8567
104	Cheshire; Crewe	nw	12	27	1310	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	12018
105	Cheshire; Northwich	nw	16	27	1250	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	11788
106	Cheshire; Altrincham	nw	16	31	1250	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	11547
107	Cheshire; Hyde	nw	15	24	1190	7/1895	11	Y	3	1	10208
108	Cheshire; Knutsford	nw	0	0	1130	7/1895	11	N	1	1	9795
109	Cornwall; West/St.Ives	sw	0	0	1010	7/1895	11	N	1	1	7569
110	Cornwall; Northwest/Camborne	sw	10	17	1010	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	7800
111	Cornwall; Truro	sw	18	22	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9057
112	Cornwall; Mid/St. Austell	sw	20	23	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9213
113	Cornwall; Southeast/Bodmin	sw	19	23	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9607
114	Cornwall; Northeast/Launceston	sw	26	28	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9423
115	Cumberland; North/Eksdale	n	39	44	1130	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	9603
116	Cumberland; Mid/Penrith	n	40	44	1070	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	8914
117	Cumberland; Cockermouth	n	25	35	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10242
118	Cumberland; West/Egremont	n	32	36	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10424
119	Derbyshire; High Peak	em	17	24	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10397
120	Derbyshire; Northeast	em	15	24	1250	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	11066
121	Derbyshire; Chesterfield	em	13	22	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10413
122	Derbyshire; West	em	0	0	1190	7/1895	11	N	1	1	10706
123	Derbyshire; Mid	em	24	28	1190	7/1895	11	Y	2	1	10479

		CANDIDATE 1													
TOTVT	TURNOUT	NAME	PARTY	VOTES	%VOTE	AGENTS	CLERKS	PRINT	MEET	ROOMS	MISC	PERSONAL	TOTAL01	TOTAL02	ROC
11019	80.17%	Compton, Lord Alwyne F	LU	5643	51.21	701.33	106.69	437.63	39.73	58.25	20.97	100.00	1464.59	1776.62	312.03
10674	83.65%	Ashton, TG	GL	5430	50.87	282.55	308.50	475.98	12.68	61.60	141.72	105.77	1388.79	1669.57	280.78
7083	82.22%	Loyd, AK	C	4064	57.38	368.40	56.30	276.55	9.00	23.50	98.25	34.50	866.50	1059.61	193.11
8671	81.64%	Mount, WG	C	4895	56.45	416.23	90.68	343.17	35.89	25.53	28.73	10.00	950.22	1175.56	225.34
		Russell, Sir G	C			37.50	0.00	18.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	56.03	78.85	22.83
10096	88.60%	Carlile, WW	C	5266	52.16	404.55	120.88	481.07	13.85	53.08	124.94	94.00	1292.36	1532.11	239.75
		De Rothschild, Baron F	LU			78.75	38.92	114.35	5.25	9.15	3.10	0.00	249.52	273.17	23.65
		Curzon, Viscount	C			121.80	14.10	120.22	4.10	5.38	13.83	5.00	284.43	308.08	23.65
8513	81.11%	Giles, CT	C	4368	51.31	310.65	84.04	452.53	21.85	39.38	144.95	81.84	1135.23	1401.85	266.61
8444	79.28%	Greene, W Raymond	C	4432	52.49	380.35	109.29	555.07	7.07	37.15	84.91	75.00	1248.84	1508.62	259.78
8077	82.94%	McCalmont, Henry LB	C	4210	52.12	170.05	93.16	578.15	30.50	38.15	196.51	96.88	1203.40	1426.54	223.14
		Cotton-Jodrell, Col ETD	C			0.00	36.83	69.31	0.00	10.00	9.03	1.00	126.16	147.84	21.68
8547	83.29%	Tollemache, HJ	C	5176	60.56	190.88	104.08	354.00	13.88	32.13	51.87	28.00	774.82	1006.48	231.65
		Bromley-Davenport, W	C			167.00	46.63	221.32	6.14	0.00	10.08	5.50	456.65	482.05	25.40
10006	83.26%	Ward, Hon RA	C	5143	51.40	297.50	81.79	370.06	27.83	21.70	55.28	91.76	945.91	1153.47	207.56
9774	82.91%	Brunner, Sir JT	GL	5706	58.38	311.90	150.78	412.93	24.43	31.50	47.70	56.60	1035.82	1290.95	255.13
9153	79.27%	Disraeli, CR	C	5264	57.51	335.68	163.80	504.29	20.38	29.03	87.98	35.00	1176.15	1426.15	250.00
9027	88.43%	Sidebotham, JW	C	4735	52.45	382.28	88.70	334.74	14.40	39.45	171.83	35.00	1066.40	1231.33	164.93
		Egerton, Hon A de T	C			105.00	16.00	50.24	2.00	0.00	4.53	0.00	177.77	206.17	28.40
		Bolitho, TB	LU			210.00	30.93	132.64	7.32	0.00	20.23	1.40	402.51	448.31	45.80
5870	75.26%	Strauss, A	LU	3166	53.94	227.85	97.65	418.65	7.58	44.50	189.06	92.50	1077.78	1243.48	165.69
6294	69.49%	Dunning-Law rence, Sir E	LU	3282	52.14	348.38	110.35	351.72	36.10	42.13	127.64	174.27	1190.58	1395.64	205.06
7285	79.07%	McArthur, WA	GL	4193	57.56	290.63	47.68	447.84	38.42	26.65	104.03	68.52	1023.77	1236.30	212.54
7527	78.35%	Courtney, Rt Hon LH	LU	4035	53.61	300.00	179.57	483.58	34.58	43.25	66.19	76.00	1183.16	1388.67	205.51
6608	70.13%	Ow en, T	GL	3633	54.98	458.48	24.00	387.42	29.87	38.08	142.78	94.38	1174.99	1430.56	255.58
7343	76.47%	Allison, RA	GL	3745	51.00	340.00	88.43	142.18	15.80	22.30	29.06	40.05	677.81	992.17	314.36
7136	80.05%	Low ther, Rt Hon JW	C	3868	54.20	326.25	81.72	243.68	6.61	28.85	41.42	58.20	786.72	1101.05	314.33
8277	80.81%	Law son, Sir Wilfrid	GL	4259	51.46	125.50	70.18	278.52	45.28	24.65	31.16	13.80	589.08	833.35	244.27
7303	70.06%	Duncombe, Hon HV	C	3717	50.90	550.00	119.80	281.35	30.37	33.00	114.56	100.00	1229.08	1491.99	262.91
8835	84.98%	Sidebottom, Capt W	C	4671	52.87	331.20	199.26	321.37	12.55	27.25	107.97	22.94	1022.54	1268.47	245.93
8947	80.85%	Bolton, TD	GL	4737	52.95	282.30	106.63	287.50	19.28	29.75	43.59	69.07	838.11	1069.82	231.70
8897	85.44%	Bayley, T	GL	4572	51.39	242.48	182.16	479.12	24.70	36.00	66.35	105.47	1136.28	1947.32	811.05
		Cavendish, VCW	LU			209.25	123.79	181.11	6.55	37.65	26.92	23.51	608.78	642.36	33.58
9277	88.53%	Jacoby, JA	GL	4926	53.10	198.26	129.62	206.88	7.25	30.18	144.02	11.46	727.67	944.59	216.92

AVCOST	CANDIDATE 2														
	NAME	PARTY	VOTES	%VOTE	AGENTS	CLERKS	PRINT	MEET	ROOMS	MISC	PERSONAL	TOTAL01	TOTAL02	ROC	AVCOST
0.31	Russell, GWE	GL	5376	48.79	563.30	141.75	296.66	16.89	50.81	100.21	86.63	1256.24	1568.27	312.03	0.29
0.31	Duke, Col OT	LU	5244	49.13	529.03	72.94	481.95	21.60	77.28	125.68	97.98	1406.44	1687.22	280.78	0.32
0.26	Pryce, CA	GL	3019	42.62	36.98	38.03	129.42	20.03	9.53	27.20	76.27	337.44	530.55	193.11	0.18
0.24	Sw inburne, Sir J	GL	3776	43.55	183.35	88.05	237.18	28.80	28.18	62.93	164.14	792.62	1017.95	225.34	0.27
0.29	Leon, HS	GL	4830	47.84	412.65	132.43	199.14	79.45	40.60	192.67	82.75	1139.69	1379.44	239.75	0.29
0.32	Brand, Hon AG	GL	4145	48.69	182.35	64.02	283.66	18.88	37.28	70.97	124.50	781.64	1048.25	266.61	0.25
0.34	Hoare, Hugh E	GL	4012	47.51	288.01	123.70	684.52	12.05	26.43	53.53	73.78	1262.01	1521.79	259.78	0.38
0.34	New nes, Sir G	GL	3867	47.88	201.41	118.56	728.46	15.09	14.33	47.20	100.00	1225.05	1448.19	223.14	0.37
0.19	Bate, Roger	GL	3371	39.44	221.18	54.19	142.63	16.75	9.28	76.13	10.00	530.15	761.80	231.65	0.23
0.22	McLaren, WSB	GL	4863	48.60	114.00	70.33	329.05	27.33	16.43	38.85	0.00	595.98	803.55	207.56	0.17
0.23	Ward, T	C	4068	41.62	314.85	94.03	316.17	30.09	35.39	55.31	25.00	870.83	1125.96	255.13	0.28
0.27	Latham, AM	GL	3889	42.49	187.51	146.39	341.24	22.90	34.33	75.27	27.10	834.73	1084.73	250.00	0.28
0.26	Rhodes, GW	GL	3844	42.58	134.83	112.65	405.78	41.88	39.43	100.60	41.30	876.46	1041.39	164.93	0.27
0.39	Conybeare, CAV	GL	2704	46.06	13.65	56.33	299.22	23.00	17.33	178.69	61.09	649.30	815.00	165.70	0.30
0.43	Waddy, HT	GL	3012	47.86	100.75	113.37	235.95	29.09	15.81	86.92	129.19	711.08	916.14	205.06	0.30
0.29	Williams, Michael	LU	3092	42.44	194.85	66.13	441.36	28.73	28.13	54.59	39.02	852.80	1065.34	212.54	0.34
0.34	McDougall, Sir J	GL	3492	46.39	209.77	37.70	271.28	26.25	23.68	36.60	63.00	668.28	873.79	205.51	0.25
0.39	Wills, Sir F	LU	2975	45.02	287.58	82.70	632.85	35.88	18.43	71.05	83.04	1211.53	1467.10	255.58	0.49
0.26	How ard, HC	LU	3598	49.00	245.60	103.69	223.33	10.05	25.25	107.93	15.00	730.85	1045.21	314.36	0.29
0.28	Douglas, Sir TS	GL	3268	45.80	145.00	35.53	135.28	8.41	13.63	50.11	15.78	403.73	718.05	314.32	0.22
0.20	Milvain, T	C	4018	48.54	200.00	70.17	331.89	22.09	21.25	43.13	36.35	724.87	969.14	244.27	0.24
0.40	Ainsw orth, David	GL	3586	49.10	126.00	66.33	164.11	15.56	13.60	9.19	7.43	402.21	664.59	262.38	0.19
0.27	Symonds, AG	GL	4164	47.13	100.00	111.75	344.41	10.06	17.13	51.12	24.73	659.21	905.14	245.93	0.22
0.23	Court, Dr J	C	4210	47.05	268.10	118.43	275.01	19.43	26.13	49.28	46.63	802.99	1084.69	281.70	0.26
0.43	Byron, AW	C	4325	48.61	279.50	193.53	479.64	23.85	58.28	108.49	0.00	1143.28	1354.32	211.05	0.31
0.19	Bridgeman, WC	C	4351	46.90	216.20	147.54	337.38	8.75	47.20	21.73	80.00	858.81	1075.73	216.92	0.25

Appendix C

Regions and their Constituent Counties

Region	Counties
East	Essex Norfolk Suffolk
East Midlands	Derbyshire Leicestershire Lincolnshire Nottinghamshire Rutland
North	Cumberland Durham Northumberland Westmorland
North West	Cheshire Lancashire
Scotland	Aberdeenshire Argyllshire Ayrshire Banffshire Berwickshire Buteshire Caithness-shire Clackmannanshire Dumbartonshire Dumfriesshire Edinburghshire Elginshire Fifeshire Forfarshire Haddingtonshire Inverness-shire Kincardineshire Kinross-shire Kirkcudbrightshire Lanarkshire Linlithgowshire Nairnshire Orkney and Shetland Peebleshire

	Perthshire Renfrewshire Ross and Cromartyshire Roxburghshire Selkirkshire Stirlingshire Sutherlandshire Wigtownshire
South East	Berkshire Hampshire Kent Middlesex Surrey Sussex
South Midland	Bedfordshire Buckinghamshire Cambridgeshire Hertfordshire Huntingdonshire Northamptonshire Oxfordshire
South West	Cornwall Devon Dorset Somerset Wiltshire
Wales	Monmouthshire All Welsh counties
West Midland	Gloucestershire Herefordshire Shropshire Staffordshire Warwickshire Worcestershire
Yorkshire	East Riding North Riding West Riding

Appendix D

Formulae for Decomposing Bias into its Components

The final formula used for calculating the bias components is detailed below, incorporating the changes made by Mortimore (1992), based on that provided in Johnston et al. (2001b: 229-30). A full algebraic derivation of the formula can be found in Brookes (1959; 1960) and Johnston (1976) and has not been included here. The formulae below omit the interactions between the different components of bias. Although the Brookes formulation expresses the bias as the number of seats that would have to change hands between two parties in order to achieve equality, the metric below incorporates the modification made by Mortimore (1992) so that it is more transparently denoted as the difference in the number of seats won by the two parties. Consequently, any decomposition of bias using the Brookes measure would produce results that would be exactly half those of the formulae below.

Let:

x = the number of seats won by party A with a certain percentage of the votes cast;

y = the number of seats won by party B with the same percentage of the votes cast;

b = the number of seats in which party A has more votes than party B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;

- f = the number of seats in which party B has more votes than party A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating y ;
- P = the average number of votes cast for parties A and B in seats where A has more votes than B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;
- Q = the average number of votes cast for parties A and B in seats where B has more votes than A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating y ;
- J = the average national electorate in seats where A has more votes than B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;
- K = the average national electorate in seats where B has more votes than A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;
- R = the average registered electorate in seats where A has more votes than B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;
- S = the average registered electorate in seats where B has more votes than A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating y ;
- C = the average number of abstentions in seats where A has more votes than B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;
- D = the average number of abstentions in seats where B has more votes than A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating y ;
- U = the average number of minor party votes in seats where A has more votes than B, when A has the percentage of votes used in calculating x ;

- V = the average number of minor party votes in seats where B has more votes than A, when B has the percentage of votes used in calculating y ;
- G = the gerrymander effect;
- NEQ = the national quotas component of the malapportionment effect;
- CSV = the electorate component of the malapportionment effect;
- A = the abstentions component of the reactive malapportionment effect;
- TPV = the third party votes component of the reactive malapportionment effect;
- TPW = the third party victories component of the reactive malapportionment effect;
- G = $[\{f(Pb/Qf-1)\} - \{b(Qf/Pb-1)\}]/2$
- NEQ = $[\{f(K/J-1)\} - \{b(J/K-1)\}]/2$
- CSV = $[\{f(S/R-1)\} - \{b(R/S-1)\}]/2$
- A = $[f\{(R/(R-C))\} \{(C/R)-(D/S)\} - b\{(S/(S-D))\} \{(D/S)-(C/R)\}]/2$
- TPV = $[f\{(R/(R-U))\} \{(U/R)-(V/S)\} - b\{(S/(S-V))\} \{(V/S)-(U/R)\}]/2$
- TPW = $(x-b) - (y-f)$

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