

# Political exchange and the voting franchise: universal democracy as an emergent process

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**Abstract** The expansion of democracy presents a puzzle for a rational choice theory of politics: why would those in power choose to dilute their power by expanding the voting franchise? In this article I introduce a new path of democratization, through mutually-beneficial political exchange aimed at securing collective-consumption goods. This political exchange path will produce a more constrained state than other paths to democracy, due to the subjective preferences of the two groups and the possibility of revoking the franchise. I briefly apply the democratization framework to the United State prior to the Civil War.

**Keywords** Democracy · Voting franchise · Political exchange · Constrained government

**JEL classification** H4 · D7

## 1 Introduction

Democracy based on universal suffrage in Western industrialized countries did not come about in a single institutional change or constitutional moment, but rather was the result of a long process of legislative and constitutional changes. Most previous studies examine specific historical cases or lay out specific paths through which democratization (expansion of the voting franchise) may occur. In this paper I present an alternative democratization path: mutually beneficial political exchanges. In other words, this paper addresses the question, why would the group in power choose to extend power to other individuals? Suffrage law changes in US states

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from 1790 to 1860 are used as case studies to show the usefulness of this framework.

In addition to better understanding the expansion of democracy, a secondary aim of this paper is to examine the policy implications of the expansion of democracy. Most theories assume that a more inclusive electorate will lead, almost inevitably, to a government that is larger in size and scope. My democratization framework shows how this may not always be the case, depending on the conditions under which the democratization takes place. If democratization occurs through the mutually beneficial exchange scenario, redistributive government spending will be constrained relative to other democratization paths.

The alternative democratization path can also be referred to as emergent democracy. Rather than new voting rights or privileges being imposed from the outside or simply handed out, they emerge as part of a process of political exchange between individuals and the groups they form. Some of these individuals are part of the political system, while others are currently excluded. Democratization can be seen as the process of including the excluded individuals in the polity. The political exchange takes place because, like economic exchange, both sides view themselves as benefitting from the exchange.

## 2 Existing frameworks for understanding democratization

In this section I describe a variety of existing explanations for the expansion of democracy within a polity. My goal here is not to present these explanations as inferior to the one I offer. In fact, each of these theories can reasonably explain different historical cases. While the explanations are not mutually exclusive, in each case one is likely to dominate. Identifying which path dominates is necessary because the nature of the democratic transition has important implications for the resulting political equilibrium, which in turn affects public policy.

Before proceeding to the paths of democratization, I should briefly mention a leading model of policy change following democratization, since I refer to it in the discussion below. The model presented by Meltzer and Richard (1981) does not contain an explanation for democratization itself, but rather shows how expanding the franchise can lead to an increase in the size and scope of government. In their model, the level of redistributive spending is determined by the median voter. A franchise expansion is assumed to bring voters with incomes below the median into the electorate, thus the new median voter will have a lower income than previously. Following democratization, an increase in redistributive spending from rich to poor is predicted by the Meltzer-Richard model. They explicitly ignore any effects of democratization on public goods spending.

Several historical cases lend support to the Meltzer-Richard model. Studies of franchise expansions for men in Great Britain (Justman and Gradstein 1999), blacks in southern US states (Husted and Kenny 1997), women in the United States (Lott and Kenny 1999), and women in Switzerland (Abrams and Settle 1999) all found increases in redistributive spending following the changes in suffrage. However, other studies have not confirmed the redistributive predictions. For example, Aidt

et al. (2006) examine a panel of 12 Western European countries from 1830 to 1938, and show an increase in spending on public goods, but no redistribution following expansion of the franchise. Aidt and Jensen (2009) focus on taxation rather than spending for a group of 17 countries. They find that early expansions of the franchise reduce the likelihood of adopting the income tax and implying that the tax structure became more regressive, though the process is reversed as universal suffrage is approached.

As discussed below the early nineteenth century in the United States was also an era of extensive franchise expansions without an immediate increase in redistributive spending. The mixed historical evidence on government spending following franchise expansions calls for a reexamination of the economic theories linking the two concepts. My emphasis on understanding the political process whereby the franchise expansion occurs can shed some light on why the consequences of democratization are often quite different historically.

## 2.1 Ideological explanations

While many of the explanations for democratization discussed below fall under the heading of rational choice, it is first necessary to describe a broad category of explanations which fall outside of a strong version of rational choice. By “strong rational choice,” I mean a relationship between a given set of ends and the means taken to achieve those ends, where the ends are defined in terms of material gains to the individual. A weaker version of rational choice is also conceivable, in which no presumption is made about the ends desired. I see ideological explanations as falling within this category of weak rational choice, which can also be referred to as non-rational choice.

The non-rational label does not indicate that the actions are irrational, but only that they cannot be explained by a standard, strong rational choice framework, where actors are maximizing pecuniary utility. Instead, under the ideological expansions of the franchise the group in power is influenced by arguments, such as those of the Enlightenment, about the basic rights of individuals in society. While this method of democratic transition is not usually spelled out formally, I view it as implicit in many historical works on suffrage transitions.<sup>1</sup> More explicit formulations of an ideological theory of suffrage expansion, stressing other-regarding behavior and reciprocity, can be found in Elster (1989); Goodin (1992), and Cohen (1997).

Precisely why this change of mind among the enfranchised class occurs is not always the same, but often it is a result of intellectual and ideological movements within a country arguing for such an expansion of rights. Regardless of how the enfranchised class or their political representatives are convinced that this denial is violation of natural rights, they are convinced, and take steps to correct the error.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of the US in the early nineteenth century, such works include Porter (1918); Williamson (1960); Chute (1969); Keyssar (2000), and Wilentz (2005), though some of Keyssar’s analysis can be interpreted as a strong form of rational choice (see Johnson 2005).

Once the new voting right has been granted, revocation is unlikely, barring a reversion of the previous change of mind about voting as a natural right.

Indeed, the revocation of previously granted voting rights may lead us to call into question whether the original granting was actually motivated by ideological concerns. Importantly, these ideological suffrage transitions contain no political bargain between the enfranchised and disenfranchised groups, making redistribution following democratization a real possibility. Such a bargain to constrain political behavior does not exist because it would be antithetical to the concept of a voting right.

The ideological path of democratization should not be seen as simply a residual category to place historical cases we cannot explain with a rational choice framework. In practice, though, most debates over the extension of suffrage have individuals arguing that the voting is a natural right. This is true regardless of whether ideology is the actual reason they seek the change in law. Thus, if no other explanation can be found, it may be necessary to assume that ideology was the driving force in extending the vote.

## 2.2 Revolutionary threats

Suffrage changes can also occur under condition of revolutionary threat from a disenfranchised group. Recent works using a revolutionary threat model include Acemoglu and Robinson (2000, 2006); Boix (2003), and Conley and Temimi (2001).<sup>2</sup> In this case, the influence on the enfranchised group is not eloquent arguments about the natural rights, but instead comes from the barrel of a gun. It is in the material interest of those in power to expand the franchise, but the process can hardly be described as voluntary.

In the revolutionary threat model, democracy is used as a credible commitment device by elites to avoid popular revolutions by the poor. Instead of simply redistributing wealth in one time period, democratizing is a means of obtaining a permanent stream of income through the political process of redistribution. Both the elites and poor are acting in a rational manner, and both are intent on achieving material gains. As with the ideological transitions, there is no voluntary political bargain between the two groups. The process can be viewed as a kind of bargain, but not the kind that will contain mechanisms to constrain the subsequent political process. In fact, the opportunity to redistribute income to the new voters is the primary reason for democratizing.

The lack of a voluntary bargain for the democratic change implies that “anything goes” in the subsequent political process. It is unlikely that any new institutional arrangements will be put in place to constrain democratic outcomes, even if the transition can be described as a bargain in some sense. When the newly enfranchised class has a lower average income than the previously enfranchised group, as is often the case, especially with economic restrictions on the franchise,

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<sup>2</sup> The applicability of this model has been challenged in the context of the US (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005) and Britain (Lizzeri and Persico 2004). Also, from a theoretical perspective, the costs of forcibly obtaining the franchise through revolution are often too high to serve as the driving force, due to either collective action problems or uncertainty about the outcome (Tullock 1971).

the redistributive results predicted by Meltzer and Richard (1981) are likely to occur.

### 2.3 Political competition

Another class of democratization models can be called political competition. These models differ from the revolutionary threat model in many ways, but an important difference is the “divided elite,” in contrast to the homogenous elite of other models. This change makes the model more realistic and allows the internal dynamics of the polity to be examined. It also brings us closer to the perspective of methodological individualism, though each group is sometimes viewed as behaving with a single mind. In broad terms, one portion of the political elite, such as a party, may be in favor of expanding the franchise while another portion is opposed. This division of opinion can exist for many reasons, but in general the party in power would support a broader electorate if the new voters were likely to support this party in the future.

Lizzeri and Persico (2004) present one version of the political competition model. They describe a situation in which elites have an incentive to democratize because they want to redirect the political process away from special interest politics and towards public goods provision. A larger electorate generates competition among political parties, who then need to support policies which provide broad social benefits, i.e. public goods. The driving factor in the model is an exogenous increase in the value of public goods, which induces more elites to support electoral reform.

Llavador and Oxoby (2005) also use a divided elite in their model of democratization. They describe democratic expansions because of competition among elites for different economic policies. The elites are assumed to be divided along sectoral lines, e.g. a land-owning elite and an industrial elite. The industrial elite will support expanding the franchise, with the new electorate supporting policies that will enhance economic growth in the industrial sector. The land-owning elite is assumed to favor the status quo, as this benefits them in a material sense.

In general, the party in power will support expanding the franchise to specific groups intended to increase the party’s vote share. The implications for policy following the democratic changes are less clear in this case. One likely consequence is that the policies supported by the pro-suffrage party will have an increased chance of being implemented, but we cannot say whether these policies will be redistributive or not.

### 2.4 Interstate competition

A fourth category of democratization models involve another form of competition, this time between different political jurisdictions, or Tiebout (1956) competition. In a competitive environment, such as when there are few restrictions on migration and trade, political jurisdictions will compete on various margins for citizens and taxpayers. One such margin is political rights, including voting rights. Expansion of voting rights is one possible means of attracting individuals to a given jurisdiction.

Engerman and Sokoloff (2005) describe a situation of political competition in the early United States. They emphasize the “frontier theory” of Turner (1906, 1920), as states on the frontier had universal suffrage before most of the original colonies. Since frontier states faced a scarcity of labor, they needed to attract new migrants and offered voting rights to do so. Also, the relative income equality in the frontier states made the broad suffrage requirements easier to implement. For non-frontier states, Engerman and Sokoloff allude to competition with or learning from frontier states. While this process does not involve any explicit bargains between parties, as long as the interstate competition continues, the states should remain constrained in their future activities and spending patterns.

### 3 Democratization within a political exchange framework

The alternative framework I present can be described as political exchange, fitting within the public choice tradition that begins with Buchanan and Tullock (1962). More specifically, this framework follows the recent work on fiscal sociology as exemplified by Wagner (2007), wherein political outcomes emerge from a process of interaction among individuals and groups in the polity. This emergent framework can be contrasted with top-down models of politics, such as those contained in some of the democratization models outlined above.

The key impetus for expanding democracy in my alternative framework is the demand for publicly-provided goods. Voting rights are used as part of a political bargain to induce individuals to contribute to the polity, either directly (e.g., by serving in the militia) or indirectly by paying taxes to fund public goods. The bargain is mutually beneficial, and is viewed this way by both parties. The newly enfranchised group receives voting rights and the previously enfranchised group receives the benefits from the public goods and services.

The potential for political exchange is made possible by the same circumstance as market exchange: subjective perception of value. The individuals in power place a greater value on the services received than any losses from extending the suffrage, and the converse is true for the currently disenfranchised group. Because of this difference in perceived value, exchange is possible. But in the market, money is often used by one party in the exchange. Why not pay for public goods directly rather than extend the franchise?

If the voting franchise is demanded for attributes which the current political class does not value, this differential in perceived value allows for political exchange. In other words, it is possible for the political class to give other citizens something of value at no cost to themselves. This possibility arises primarily if citizens value the vote for its own sake, for instance, as a badge of citizenship in the community (see Sect. 3.3). While this sounds similar to the ideological theory described above, it is distinct because the ideology is only on the demand side for voting rights. This distinction is crucial because it makes voluntary political bargains possible. When the ideological value is on the supply side, there will be no exchange because none is needed; the enfranchised group will simply give away the franchise for free.

Another reason for using the franchise rather than pecuniary rewards as compensation is the nature of the demand, whether it is seen as a temporary or permanent increase. If the demand for the service is viewed as temporary, monetary compensation will be used. If the demand for the service is viewed as permanent, franchise extension will be used. Revoking the franchise is difficult for a number of reasons, above all because the group being threatened with disenfranchisement is now a part of the political process. Therefore, the suppliers of the franchise should only be willing to use the franchise in cases where they anticipate that the services of the newly enfranchised group will be needed on a permanent basis.

Recent work by Congleton (2004, 2007, 2011) also uses a mutually beneficial, political exchange framework to explain transitions from autocracy to democracy, including the expansion of suffrage. Congleton (2004) argues that industrialization can reduce the cost of political organization, which can generate suffrage reforms, similar to my argument in Sect. 3.4 below about collective action. Congleton's recent book (2011) provides a general framework for understanding changes in the powers of the legislature and the representation of the legislature (i.e., suffrage) using a gradual, rational choice model that involves mutually beneficial political exchanges. In these ways Congleton's work is similar to my analysis in this paper.

However, the main difference between my analysis and Congleton's is the reason these political exchanges are made. In his discussion of the mechanisms for expanding suffrage (2011: 161–183), Congleton emphasizes changing norms about suffrage by those with political power. This argument places him in the category of ideological theories of suffrage reform in Sect. 2.1 above. Thus my analysis is complementary to Congleton's, but I suggest a different mechanism for why the legislature would choose to extend suffrage. Congleton does not discuss the possibility that voting rights are granted to secure provision of public services by the new voters.

While my emphasis is on the demand for collectively consumed goods, demand for increased tax revenue may produce similar results. If most existing sources of tax revenue are already being optimally exploited, increasing state revenues is difficult. Thus, polities may offer voting rights in exchange for payment of taxes. Suffrage based on payment of taxes is discussed in Bates and Lien (1985); Barzel (2000); Barzel and Kiser (1997, 2002), and Congleton (2004, 2007) in both theoretical and historical contexts. Recent research by Aidt et al. (2010) also shows that increasing the franchise may not always increase tax revenue. During initial expansions of voting rights (less than 40% of adults), government spending and taxes may actually decrease, as the new voters may have a lower demand for public services when they are the ones paying the bill.

### 3.1 The demand for publicly-provided goods

In order to be useful, the framework should be able to predict when political exchange and franchise expansion will occur. At the very least, it should tell us under what circumstances political exchange is likely to occur, even if other theories are needed to explain the full historical record of franchise expansions. For example, as discussed below, franchise expansions in the US happened in some states as early

as the 1790s but not until the 1840s in other states. Why the lag of half a century between different states?

In the political exchange framework, the demand for public goods by enfranchised citizens serves as the primary impetus for extending the franchise to other individuals. The exchange is made possible by the demand for voting rights from these other, unenfranchised individuals, who in turn provide various services that are collectively consumed. Assuming that the demand for voting rights is constant over time, we can focus on changes in the demand for public goods. It is useful to frame the discussion within the context of defensive services as were provided by the militia in the early United States, although the framework is applicable to a variety of goods and services (e.g., fire patrol or highway workers). The sketch of historical details presented here is expanded in Sect. 4 below.

Changes in demand for militia services in a given state come about from several sources, primarily related to threats faced by individuals within a state. One broad category of threats was those faced by frontier states: from foreign nations, the native population, as well as the generally lawless nature of the frontier society. New states were nearly always frontier states when they joined the union, but several of the original states were also on the frontier before the westward expansion began. Threats from foreign nations are not confined to frontier states, since nearly all of the original states also possessed an ocean border. Southern states also faced a constant internal threat from the large African population that they enslaved, though there was variation in the magnitude of this threat across Southern states based on the number of slaves and other factors. Additionally, the threat to a state may come from the citizens themselves as in the revolutionary threat model described above.

Aside from internal revolution, the threats to states are essentially exogenous to the internal activities of the state (though threats to security can often be a reaction to activities of the state). Thus, the framework relies heavily on the existence of these exogenous shocks to influence changes in suffrage law. From this fact it appears that the advance of democracy is due almost entirely to chance events. There is some truth to this, but that should not cause despair. Despite appearances, public policy is rarely an object of pure choice for individuals in the polity (Wagner 2007). Instead, the polity interacts with a wide variety of social and economic forces in society, many of which serve as strong constraints on the actions of the polity. One may refer to these other forces as “chance,” but that does not remove the duty of the social scientist to understand these various forces as best they can.

### 3.2 Predicting democratic expansion

The connection between democratizing and providing public goods can be viewed as a standard prisoner’s dilemma. The socially optimal result is for the enfranchised class to extend the franchise, and the previously disenfranchised class to provide the public service while not voting for redistribution. In a finitely repeated scenario, each party has the incentive to defect, with the result being a restricted franchise and weak provision of public goods. While infinitely repeated play may sustain cooperation it is by no means guaranteed, as per the folk theorem. Alternatively, cooperation can be sustained by the existence of credible threats and commitments.



A major threat that exists from the group granting suffrage rights is the threat of taking away the franchise if the agreement is violated (e.g., by not fully providing the public good or by redistributing wealth). One way that the threat can be seen as credible is if it has been exercised in the recent past. For example, North and Weingast (1989) identify the previous depositions of monarchs as one of two key factors that made the post-Glorious Revolution institutions self-enforcing.<sup>3</sup> In the early American Republic, the retraction of voting rights occurred in nearly all states for different social groups. These retractions often occurred simultaneously with expansions of the franchise, e.g., in New Jersey in 1807 voting rights were taken away from property-holding women and blacks while they were granted to tax-paying white men.

However, the credible threats may not be enough to sustain cooperation, especially in a finitely-repeated scenario. A more formal statement can clarify precisely when political exchange can occur.<sup>4</sup> Assume there are only two groups in society,  $A$  and  $B$ , with  $A$  being the enfranchised group. Both groups can contribute to a public good,  $g$ , such as militia service, which is the sum of the two contributions,  $g_A$  and  $g_B$ . The utility functions of the two groups can be defined as.

$$\begin{aligned} u_A &= b_A(v_{AG_A} + g_B) - C_A(g_A) - R \\ u_B &= b_B(g_A + v_{BG_B}) - C_B(g_B) + R \end{aligned}$$

where  $b_i$  is a positive constant,  $v_i$  is the value of the vote,  $C_i$  is a convex cost function of providing the public good, and  $R$  is redistribution from  $A$  to  $B$ . One important assumption of the model is that if a group does not currently have the voting franchise, they will not voluntarily supply the public good without monetary compensation. This implies that individuals only derive utility from supplying the public good if they have the vote and place a positive value on the voting franchise (otherwise  $v_i g_i = 0$ ).

Redistribution can only occur if group  $B$  is granted the franchise. If both groups expect  $R = 0$ , voluntary enfranchisement will occur as long as group  $B$  values the voting franchise and the additional public good more than the cost of providing the public good (i.e.,  $v_B b_B g_B^* \geq C_B(g_B^*)$ ). If they expect  $R > 0$ , group  $A$  must value the public good supplied by  $B$  more than the expected redistribution for enfranchisement to occur (i.e.,  $b_A g_B^* \geq R$ ). Group  $B$  is, of course, more likely to support enfranchisement in the case  $R > 0$  case.

The value of  $R$  will be determined by a variety of exogenous factors such as the current state of tax collection technology and the distribution of income. For the purposes of my argument these factors can be taken as given, and it is only important that individuals can reasonably anticipate the value of  $R$ . The additional value of the public good to group  $A$  (i.e.,  $b_A g_B^*$ ) and the value of the vote to group  $B$  (i.e.,  $v_B b_B$ ) are two elements which require the most discussion. Changes in the former were discussed in Sect. 3.1, whereby the group with political power has a

<sup>3</sup> Contrary to North and Weingast, in my framework extending the franchise is itself not necessarily a credible commitment, especially since numerous historical examples of revoking suffrage rights can be found.

<sup>4</sup> I am especially grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this formalization.

demand for public services to be supplied by the unenfranchised group. I now turn to changes in the latter, or why the unenfranchised group would value obtaining the voting franchise.

### 3.3 The value of a vote

An important part of the process of franchise-expansion bargaining is that individuals actually demand the franchise. If there is little or no demand, it is unlikely that citizens will provide services in exchange for the privilege of voting. Moreover, individuals must value the vote for reasons other than its pecuniary political rewards for political exchange to occur. In other words, if the primary reason that the vote is valued is for its power to redistribute income, it is unlikely to be granted in the first place. It should be noted that this is only true within the political exchange framework. It is still possible that the vote would be granted if the grantors derive ideological satisfaction from doing so, as described in the previous section.

A strong tradition of theory and research in public choice suggests that the instrumental value of a vote is very close to zero (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Because of this, the fact that people vote in political elections is often referred to as a paradox. Since the probability of casting a decisive vote is approximately zero, it follows that the act of voting is irrational if any costs must be undertaken. Recognizing the fact that people do, in fact, engage in the act of voting, a variety of non-instrumental rationales have been proposed to resolve the paradox. Thus while the act of voting may not be rational in the sense of pecuniary rewards, it is possible to explain voting based on a more broadly-defined utility function.

When discussing the politics of enfranchisement, it must be kept in mind that we are describing a slightly different paradox. We are not interested in why individuals do or don't vote, but rather why they would be interested in possessing the privilege of voting. The reasons one would actually vote extend backwards to the demand for the vote in the first place, but this does not preclude other reasons for wanting to be a member of the electorate. The combined benefits derived from both the privilege of voting and the act of voting may be much greater than those from voting alone (by definition, they cannot be smaller). A variety of reasons for demanding the franchise, even if one did not plan to ever exercise the franchise, can be put forward.

One major reason that individuals would demand the political franchise is its relationship to citizenship. Being considered a citizen of a given community or polity is something for which individuals have a demand and may be willing to pay a high cost. Whether one is classified as a citizen can have significant legal and political consequences. Historically various rights and privileges have been granted to citizens while denied to non-citizens. And importantly, there has also been a historical practice of legally equating citizenship with the voting franchise (Shklar 1991; Smith 1997). Thus if a demand for citizenship exists, a derived demand for the voting franchise may also exist.

Another reason that individuals may value the franchise beyond its instrumental value is suggested by Conley and Temimi (2001). While they present a model of enfranchisement based on a revolutionary threat, they also give reasons why

individuals would value the franchise but not the vote. The primary reason is that individuals are often part of groups, such as religious or class-based groups, which have a common set of interests. If the suffrage expansion involves the enfranchisement of a large number of people with similar interests, they will place a value on obtaining the franchise regardless of individual benefits from the act of voting. But crucially, the value they place on the franchise must be for reasons other than redistributing income.

The differential valuation of the franchise between suppliers and demanders is most likely to exist when the unenfranchised group is seeking negative liberties. In other words, when group *B* is not seeking some positive action on the part of group *A*, such as monetary transfers or social services, the cost of granting the right is likely to be low or zero. For example, if the unenfranchised group is seeking religious liberties, the value they place on not being persecuted will be much greater than the utility that the persecutors stand to lose (even if it is not zero). The fact that the demand is for negative liberties provides another reason why the state will not grow after extending the franchise, since no additional expenditures are necessary to meet this demand.

Of course, the collective action problem (discussed below) still exists, meaning that some groups may never be enfranchised in this manner. However, this does not preclude the possibility that some groups will overcome the collective action problem. This may once again involve chance circumstances, as situations can arise in which the group is organized for other purposes. Such examples could be soldiers following a major war, or unskilled workers that have been placed together in a large factory and may have already overcome the collective action problem to form unions.

### 3.4 Collective action

A related issue, implicitly solved in the above game of political bargaining, is the problem of collective action. A paradox of political activities, first spelled out by Olson (1965), is that before groups in society can bargain in the political process, they must become organized. However, since any change in law is a public good for the group, there will be little incentive for any individual to organize in the first place. But as Olson pointed out, some political groups clearly do overcome the collective action problem through a variety of methods. Olson's logic has direct implications for suffrage reform, since the currently enfranchised group is already organized (through the political system itself) and the disenfranchised portion of society is often unorganized.

As discussed further in Sect. 4, the existence of the militia and the presence of war provided an opportunity for overcoming the problems of political organization.<sup>5</sup> Wartime experience operated through two channels to overcome collective action problems: by increasing the demand for protective services; and by lowering the cost of organization (militia members were already organized to fight in the war).

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<sup>5</sup> The connection between wars and franchise expansions throughout US history has been noted by many authors, including Scarry (1991: 1304–1308); Porter (1994: 247), Keyssar (2000: xxi, 169–170), and Karlan (2003).

Furthermore, the political class is less likely to extend the franchise to an unorganized group, as this presents uncertainty that the political bargain will be followed.

Another possibility for achieving collective action should be stressed here, and that is the organizing forces which rising incomes may produce. The industrial revolution was characterized by the growth of large cities and economies of scale in factory size, which also helped the growth of labor unions. All of these factors have the characteristic of putting men into contact with one another, especially men who may not have been organized before. The importance of organized labor for many revolutionary democratic movements in Europe and Latin America (Collier 1999) fits nicely into this pattern, as well as that of Rhode Island in the 1840s (discussed below).

### 3.5 Policy implications of democratization

As discussed above, the policy implications of expanding the franchise point in the direction of increased government spending, particularly redistributive spending. In both theory and history, a broader electorate is often viewed as bring about the unconstrained state. The formal logic supporting this view can be found in Meltzer and Richard (1981). When the newly enfranchised class has a lower average income than the existing electorate, the income of the decisive voter will be lowered. Historically this condition often holds, as many franchise restrictions have been based on economic factors. This logic also sets up the puzzle of why democratization occurs, since it will harm the present political class (addressed in various ways by the theories described above).

The political exchange framework outlined in this paper differs from most democratization theories in that government growth and redistribution should not necessarily follow a broadening of the electorate. The framework describes a path by which politics can become more inclusive, yet the size and scope of government activities can remain relatively unchanged. My analysis is not completely unique in suggesting that expanding voting rights does not necessarily expand government. The research by Aidt et al. (2010) discussed above shows that there can be a U-shaped relationship between government spending and suffrage expansion, with spending decreasing over some range of suffrage expansions.

Since political debates may obscure the underlying reasons for enacting policy, deeper investigation is required to determine what drives changes in suffrage restrictions. However, care must be taken so that we are not simply projecting motives backwards based on political outcomes. For instance, it would be incorrect to claim that political exchange drove a particular suffrage expansion simply because redistribution did not occur. Nevertheless, historical expansions of the electorate not followed by an increase in the redistribution call for an examination of how the transition occurred.

## 4 Suffrage reform in antebellum America

The history of suffrage in the early United States presents a useful case study for the framework outlined in this paper. The broad trend between the Revolution and the

Civil War was the gradual removal of restrictions on voting for adult white males. Economic restrictions, primarily land and property owning but also taxpaying, dominated early in the period, but by the 1850s nearly all of these restrictions had been dropped. The changes all took place at the state-level, and most states removed the restrictions in several steps. Non-whites and non-males were still largely prohibited from voting, but the expansion of suffrage for white males was quite dramatic in the aggregate: approximately 25–50% of white males were not able to vote following the Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Following the American Revolution, nearly all states rewrote their constitutions. While many states modified the requirements for voting, none moved to universal manhood suffrage. Most states retained some form of property or land owning requirement, although four did move to a tax-paying alternative. Following the ratification of the federal Constitution, several more states reformed their suffrage laws, with three (New Hampshire, Georgia, and Maryland) moving to universal suffrage for white males by 1802. One more state, South Carolina, adopted universal suffrage by 1810, prior to the wave of reforms following the War of 1812.

Several paths of democratization are evident in these early adopters. New Hampshire may have been driven by political competition, as they reformed suffrage immediately following neighboring Vermont's admission as the first state with universal manhood suffrage.<sup>7</sup> External threats are also a potential motivating factor for most of these states. Such external threats, whether from foreign nations, native tribes, or slave revolts, would increase the demand for security. This increased demand for security could manifest itself in a political exchange with those capable of providing security, e.g., the local militia members. Since the militia was *de jure* (though not always *de facto*) composed of all white males between 18 and 44, extensions of the franchise to all white males can be viewed as roughly equivalent.<sup>8</sup>

External threats could be greater in a given state for a variety of reasons, but one simple reason is geographic location, such as being located on the frontier. At the time of their reforms New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Georgia were all

<sup>6</sup> Estimates of the percentage of adult white males that were eligible to vote around 1790 vary widely, but most range from just under 50% (Soltow 1984: 451) to around 75% (Main 1965). Williamson (1960: 38) and Bailyn (1969: 87) agree with the range of 50–75% of white males, though there is considerable variation across states and localities. See Lutz (1991: 23–24) for further discussion of these estimates.

<sup>7</sup> The journal of the convention in New Hampshire notes the change in wording of the suffrage clause, but provides no guidance on the rationale behind the change (Journal of the convention which revised the state constitution in 1791–1792, 1877: 95). The impact of political competition with Vermont is proposed by scholars ranging from Progressive Era historian Kirk Porter (1918: 23) to modern economic historians Engerman and Sokoloff (2005: 902).

<sup>8</sup> The requirement for white men 18–44 to perform militia service comes from two acts passed in 1792, collectively referred to as the Militia Act of 1792. The second of the two acts, the Calling Forth Act, established fines for not participating in the militia when called into the service of the United States. Fines were imposed, and although collection was often difficult, the aggregate amounts could be substantial. For instance, following the War of 1812, around 10,000 men were fined a total of nearly \$500,000 at a time when the federal budget was around only \$20 million (American State Papers: Military Affairs and 1832: *Military Affairs*, Vol. 2 p. 316). On the compulsory nature of the militia system see Mahon (1960: 18–22, 47–48), Hummel (2001: 45–48, 56–57), and *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, Vol. 2 (315–319, 329–337, 389–395, 527–529).

essentially on the frontier or bordered foreign nations. The large enslaved black populations in Georgia and South Carolina also presented a threat which would have encouraged political inclusion of white males. These two states can be contrasted with Virginia and North Carolina, also slave states, but shielded from the frontier by new territories. As can be seen from these first few examples, it is often a combination of factors and threats which drive reform, rather than a single cause.

Maryland, though not a frontier state, did have a slave population, though it was the smallest of the five southern states (compared to their free populations). The influence of the militia, the demand for protection, and political exchange appears to be the dominant path in Maryland. Militia members first demanded the vote in 1776, threatening to put down their arms if they were not permitted a say in the government they defended. Though this effort was unsuccessful, a bill was introduced in 1797, once again under the approaching threat of war (this time with France in the Quasi-War), and after being defeated in several consecutive years the reforms passed in 1802. South Carolina also began consideration of suffrage reform under threat of war, following the *Chesapeake* Affair (part of the buildup to the War of 1812), with appeals made to disenfranchised militia members as well as others providing public services (e.g., those working on the roads and the slave patrols).<sup>9</sup>

The changes in suffrage law following the War of 1812 further highlight the role of political exchange and public goods provision. The War focused the attention of the nation on the importance of supporting public defense, while at the same time lowering the costs of organization for militia members. In the constitutional and legislative changes following the War, two states, Connecticut and New York, explicitly adopted laws granting suffrage to militia members.<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts replaced their property requirement for voting with a tax-paying one, although the importance of including militia members was often mentioned in the debates.<sup>11</sup>

The pressure by militia members to change suffrage law also showed up in Virginia after the War, with petitions being filed in around two dozen counties that specifically addressed the lack of voting rights for militia members in 1815 and 1816.<sup>12</sup> Those efforts would initially be ineffective, but a constitutional convention was eventually held in 1829–1830. In the resulting constitution the burden for property-holding was lowered, with debate on suffrage often centering on

<sup>9</sup> See the historians Williamson (1960: 108–109, 138–151); Kruman (1997: 91, 99–100); Pole (1958), and Keyssar (2000: 16–17) for discussion of Maryland, and McKinley (1905: 148–162); Steinfeld (1989: 339–340), and Williamson (1960: 151–157) on South Carolina.

<sup>10</sup> On Connecticut, see Kruman (1997: 16); Williamson (1960: 113, 182–190), and Wilentz (2005: 183–185). For New York, see Carter and Stone (1821: 181, 235); Porter (1918: 54–62), and Williamson (1960: 195–207).

<sup>11</sup> Peterson (1966: 11) and Hale and Hale (1853: 246, 249, 253).

<sup>12</sup> Pole (1966: 305–312); Williamson (1960: 226–227), and Keyssar (2000: 35–36). Petitions are on file at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, VA and are searchable online at <http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwehave/gov/petitions/>. For instance, in December 1815 there were petitions filed in at least seven counties which asked for “a Convention of the People to expand suffrage to all men who pay taxes or who serve in the militia.”

disenfranchised militia members. However, full liberalization of the franchise would not take place until 1850.<sup>13</sup>

Several of the original US states did not adopt universal suffrage for white males until later in the pre-Civil War period, while a few never completely dropped tax and property restrictions. These late adopters include Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. Most of these states had some suffrage reforms early on, even if they were not complete movements to universal suffrage. For instance, as discussed above, suffrage in Massachusetts was influenced by the War of 1812, but only to replace the property requirement with a tax-paying one. Rhode Island would grant the vote to militia members and taxpayers in 1842, but only after the suffrage-inspired Dorr Revolution; this change can be seen as involving both ideological and revolutionary threat motives.<sup>14</sup>

A crucial question for interpreting history through my democratization framework is why some states waited longer than their neighbors to reform suffrage law. In the framework, it is the absence rather than the presence of any factor that would delay suffrage reform. One factor that was absent in many of these late reforming states was external and internal threats, or at least the threats were less severe when compared with the early reforming states. The lack of threats can be linked to several causes, such as not being on the frontier or possessing no slave population (or a small one relative to neighboring states, as in North Carolina). When these motivating factors are not present, demand for suffrage reform may continue to increase until it is implemented through means other than political exchange.

## 5 Conclusion

By viewing democratization within a framework of political exchange, it is more comprehensible within the confines of a rational choice approach to politics. Mutually beneficial political exchange for the voting franchise is theoretically possible, even without threats of revolution. Furthermore, the political exchange path expands the number of historical cases of democratization we are able to explain. The changes in the US prior to the Civil War demonstrate the importance of political exchange, as well as other complementary democratic paths such as interstate competition. Another historical example which may fit this pattern is the Roman Empire. In the Early Roman Empire, individuals serving in the army as Auxiliaries for 25 years would gain Roman citizenship, of which one benefit was the right to vote (Keppie 1984: 182–186).

<sup>13</sup> Peterson (1966: 279–281); Pole (1966: 314–338); Williamson (1960: 231–234); Shade (1996: 62–70); Keyssar (2000: 35–37). A memorial from the non-freeholders of Richmond appears in full in proceedings (*Proceedings and Debates of...Virginia* 1830: 25–31), and others are mentioned as well (e.g., from Rockingham county, p. 32); for discussion of suffrage and the militia, see p. 123–124.

<sup>14</sup> The classic account of the Dorr War is Mowry (1901), while two studies from the 1970s, Gettleman (1973) and (Dennison 1976), are also highly valuable though differing slightly in their interpretations of the episode. I draw on these and other sources, including Williamson (1960: 242–259); Keyssar (2000: 71–76); Wilentz (2005: 539–546), and Formisano (2008: 150–176).

Understanding the factors influencing democratization is not only important for an accurate view of history; it can also better explain the political outcomes and nature of the state following democratization. In both theory and history, expanding democracy has traditionally been viewed as inherently leading to a larger, more redistributive state. However, given that we observe variation in these outcomes across states and across time, a clearer understanding of these differences would be fruitful. The politics of enfranchisement is one factor which has potential consequences for the size and scope of government. Precisely how important this factor is deserves deeper inquiry.

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