Comparing "responsible party government" in the US and the UK*

by

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Abstract: Responsible parties are conventionally defined as those capable of announcing their legislative goals and then passing them on the strength of their own members' votes. In this paper, I consider why UK majority parties have closely approximated these conditions for responsibility since the 1880s, while US majority parties have never approximated them closely. I provide the first systematic evidence on when the British opposition began to offer across-the-board opposition to the government's agenda and when the government became able to pass bills using only its own members' votes. I also explore the role that leaders' control of the legislative agenda and their followers' nominations played in these developments. I attribute US parties' inability to mimic their British counterparts to different costs of defending bill passage coalitions against "weakest-link" attacks.

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Comparing party government in the US and the UK

Responsible parties are conventionally defined as those capable of announcing their legislative goals and then passing them on the strength of their own members' votes. In this paper I analyze the strategic pre-conditions of party responsibility by comparing the UK and US. Why were majority-party leaders in the UK able to construct responsible parties by the 1880s and (mostly) maintain them since? Why, in contrast, have US majority leaders been much less successful in establishing party responsibility?

Most previous discussions have argued that the US's constitutional structure—presidential, bicameral and federal—makes it difficult for a single party to control the legislative process and thus for voters to assign responsibility for policy outcomes (Fiorina 1980). The prospects for party control and accountability look much brighter in the UK—parliamentary, nearly unicameral since 1911, and unitary. However, constitutional differences can explain only so much. The UK did not change its constitutional stripes between 1832 and 1910, yet party responsibility was weak at the beginning and strong at the end of this period. The US did not change its constitutional structure after 1788, yet its parties varied widely over time in their responsibility. Thus, it makes sense to examine how political parties have adapted over time to the constitutional systems they faced.

I shall argue that, between the beginning and end of the 19th century, British party leaders centralized power and authority within their parties in three key ways, allowing them to build "responsible" parties. First, the governing party's leaders centralized control over the legislative agenda in their own hands. Second, the out parties' leaders centralized control over the decision to oppose the government's bills in their own hands. Third, all party leaders

centralized control over their followers' nominations in their own hands. The result of this constellation of changes was the familiar "Westminster" pattern of governments proposing, oppositions opposing, and governments prevailing.

Party adaptations in Britain were motivated by a problem that majority-party leaders in both the UK and US must confront: minority parties possess an inherent advantage in defending the status quo—they can attack the "weakest links" in the coalition supporting each bill the majority party proposes. I argue that weakest-link attacks have been structurally easier in the US than in the UK since the 1880s, not just because US majority-party leaders face constitutional difficulties but also because they lack nomination control. In the US, congressional nominations have always been decided at the state and local levels with minimal input from central party leaders. In the UK, nomination control has been relatively centralized since the 1880s.

Aside from focusing theoretical attention on the weakest-link problem and the differing ways that party leaders can navigate it, the main empirical contributions I make here are to offer the first analysis of *when* and *why* British leaders' increasing control over their MPs' nominations contributed to party responsibility in the UK. I follow this with a briefer discussion of the consequences of US leaders' relatively weak nomination control for their legislative strategies.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. I first discuss the logic of weakest-link attacks and the strategic origins of minority rolls. The bulk of the paper then describes when and how the UK built responsible parties. After providing the first systematic evidence documenting when the minority began to oppose virtually everything the majority proposed, I show that—

holding whipping and invocations of confidence constant—party cohesion on the government's legislative agenda increased substantially after the second and third reform acts. I argue that this increase in cohesion was driven mainly by party leaders' increasing control over nominations; and provide correlational evidence that dissidents received systematically poorer nominations than loyalists. I then offer some comments on the "responsibility deficit" in the contemporary US, considering why US party leaders have seemingly been less able to control legislative outcomes in the last generation, rendering the country less governable (Rosenbluth and Shapiro 2018; Lee and McCarty 2019; Popkin 2021).

Weakest-link attacks and the strategic origins of minority rolls

The Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association famously argued that the US would benefit by developing "responsible" political parties. They defined such parties as those "able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves…[and that possess]…sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs," should they secure the majorities needed to govern. The opposition party, meanwhile, "acts as the critic of the party in power, developing, defining and presenting the policy alternatives which are necessary for a true choice in reaching public decisions" (APSA 1950, pp. 17-18).

As Ranney (1954) pointed out, this conception of party responsibility rested heavily on scholarly perceptions of how British parties operated in the period of mass suffrage after the third reform act (1884). Here I question when and how British parties became responsible over the course of the 19th century, using the answers to illuminate why American parties have of late seemed to labor under a responsibility deficit—despite achieving high levels of observed voting cohesion in Congress.

My analysis begins by considering a majority party whose leaders can place whatever bills they wish onto the floor agenda and secure final passage votes for them in a timely fashion. This level of agenda control was reached in the UK by the early 1880s, after the closure motion was adopted to quell Irish Nationalist obstructionism (Dion 1997; Koß 2015), and in the US in 1890, after Reed's rules outlawed the dilatory tactics that minority parties had previously deployed (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

When the legislature votes on a motion to pass one of the majority's bills, a minority (or opposition) party is said to be "rolled" if most of its voting members oppose the motion but it nonetheless passes (Cox and McCubbins 2005). Minority rolls can occur only when majority-party leaders push (or allow) "partisan" bills—those that most minority legislators oppose—onto the floor agenda.

If majority leaders do push (or allow) partisan bills, opponents—who may include dissident elements of the majority party, special interest groups, and the minority party's leaders—have a natural strategy. They can identify each bill's most weakly committed supporters and convince just enough of them to abstain or oppose it. This tactic of attacking the "weakest links" in the majority's coalition on each bill is a general feature of Colonel Blotto games (e.g., Powell 2009) and has been widely recognized in the literature on legislative voting since Groseclose and Snyder's (1996) seminal exploration.

The majority leadership's best response to a looming weakest-link attack is also straightforward. They can allocate "side payments" so as to make every member of the

coalition supporting the bill equally difficult to convert to opposition or abstention.[1] Groseclose and Snyder (1996, p. 307) call this a *leveling strategy* and explain its logic as

> similar to the 'no-soft-spots' theory of international relations (Dresher 1966). Suppose a nation…has only two places through which it can be attacked, a plain and a mountain pass. Optimal placement requires that more troops be put along the plain, since this point is easier to invade. In fact, since an invader would choose the weakest point of entry, the defender's optimal strategy is to allocate troops such that each point is equally difficult to invade, that is, no spot is any softer than another.

Implementation of leveling strategies

How would majority-party leaders implement a leveling strategy in practice? One question concerns the substance of the side payments. In much of the US literature the majority leadership is envisioned as compensating supporters for their (potentially electorally costly) votes with distributive spending projects (Carroll and Kim 2010) and campaign donations (Jenkins and Monroe 2012).[2]

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[1] Potential weakest links can also be protected by procedural tricks making it harder for voters to discern the substantive meaning of votes cast (Arnold 1990); or by withholding legislative texts until the last moment before members are asked to vote on them (Curry 2015).

[2] Evans (2004) provides a more general survey of the use of side payments to clinch legislative deals in the US Congress.

Another issue in implementing levelling strategies concerns timing. In the US, majority-party leaders are often depicted as reactive. If a particular supporter is threatened with electoral retribution for supporting a particular bill, the leadership seeks to negotiate a project or donation to offset that risk. In other cases, US leaders are said to be more proactive, negotiating "just in case we need your vote" deals with their followers (King and Zeckhauser 2003). Regardless of whether they are proactive or reactive, leaders are typically viewed as compensating followers for the electoral risks their loyalty entails on each bill they support.[3]

In the UK, because no residency requirements restrict where candidates can seek election, majority-party leaders have another, more potent, tool with which to compensate party loyalists. They can promise a backbencher that, should their vote cost them the next election, then the leaders will find their loyal supporter a new, winnable constituency. This promise of electoral redemption has been credible since at least the 1880s, and probably earlier (Cox and Nowacki 2021). In the US, in contrast, members face a normative expectation of district residency; and party leaders have little influence over nominations. Thus, leadership-brokered transfers to other districts to compensate party loyalists are almost always out of the question.

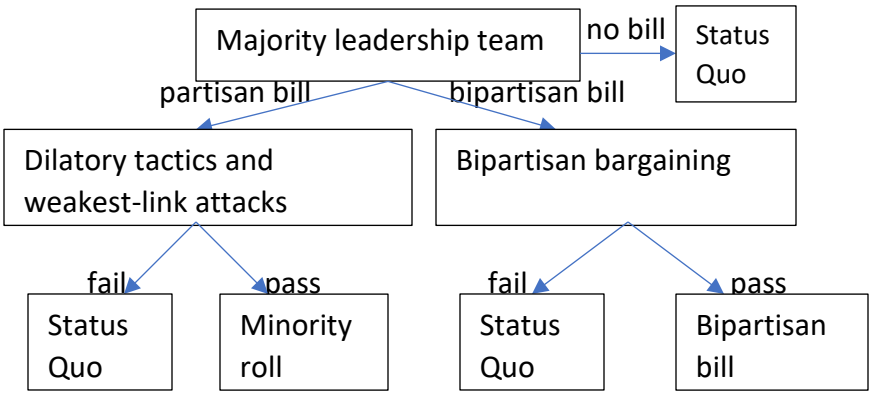
Choosing between partisan and bipartisan strategies to enact bills

The costs of overcoming delaying tactics and compensating weakest links may convince majority-party leaders to avoid "partisan" bills that most of the minority will oppose. Instead,

[3] Sometimes the weakest links in a party's coalition are its own ideologically extreme members—such as Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in recent US politics. Here, I focus on those who are weak links due to their exposure to electoral competition.

they may pursue no legislation at all or seek to negotiate bipartisan bills and pass them with bipartisan support. Figure 1 displays the majority leadership team's choices in schematic form.[4]

Figure 1: A diagram of majority leaders' legislative options



If majority-party leaders choose to promote a partisan bill, following the left-hand branch in the diagram, they will have to overcome the minority's delaying tactics and compensate the weakest links in the coalition supporting passage. If they fail to negotiate sufficient compensation for enough supporters, then the bill will fail, preserving the status quo.[5] Otherwise, the bill will pass and result in a minority roll.

If majority-party leaders choose a bipartisan strategy, following the right-hand branch in the diagram, they will have to negotiate the terms of the bill with the minority. If these negotiations fail, then so will the bill. Otherwise, a bipartisan bill will pass.

[4] Figure 1 focuses on bills whose failure would preserve the status quo.

[5] Of course, leaders failing to pass a partisan bill might then introduce a bipartisan bill, so the status quo may be preserved only temporarily.

Finally, majority-party leaders may view the costs of both their partisan and bipartisan options as too high and choose not to pursue any bill. By making this choice they free up time on the floor agenda which they can use to promote other bills.

Choosing the partisan path

At the beginning of the 19th century, government leaders in the UK rarely promoted partisan legislative bills and, when they did, they were not even sure who their followers would be. By the end of the 19th century, in contrast, UK party leaders were regularly opting to push partisan bills onto the agenda and then pass them on the strength of their own followers' votes against unified opposition from the other parties. The result was that a high fraction of government initiatives resulted in minority rolls.

I shall argue that, between the beginning and end of the century, British party leaders took three key steps to centralize power and authority within their parties, allowing them to choose the path of "party responsibility." First, as is well known, control over the legislative agenda was centralized in the hands of the governing party's leaders in cabinet (Cox 1987; Dion 1997; Eggers and Spirling 2014b; Koß 2015). Second, control over the decision to oppose the government's bills was centralized in the hands of the out parties' leaders (on which more below). Third, control over their followers' nominations was centralized in the hands of each party's leaders, empowering them to marshal their rank and file in favor of, or in opposition to, the government's legislative agenda.

To put it another way, I shall argue that the familiar "Westminster" pattern of government and opposition was not an automatic result of parliamentarism—which did not change over the period studied—but instead required strategic investments in agenda and

nomination control to complement the power that votes of confidence and the prime minister's ability to nominate ministers already conferred. Once these investments had been made, party leaders wielded a *combination* of *complementary* powers—(i) extensive power over the legislative agenda, including the ability to overcome the minority's dilatory tactics and the ability to invoke confidence; and (ii) extensive power over nominations, both to parliamentary seats and to higher offices—sufficient to enable the majority to fend off weakest-link attacks and proceed with a partisan legislative agenda. I shall elaborate this account in the next several sections, providing supportive empirical evidence.

When did responsible parties emerge in the UK?

At the formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801, the House of Lords had a constitutional right to veto legislation; and party leaders had relatively little influence over either the legislative agenda or electoral nominations. Agenda control was decentralized to many "private" or "unofficial" members (Cox 1987), while nomination control was decentralized to between 90 and 101 patronal peers, along with a variety of other local notables (Sack 1980). Thus, governments had to defend against weakest-link attacks in both the House of Lords and House of Commons; and had to rely on costly resources, such as sinecures, pensions and state contracts, to buy support (Foord 1947).

After the Great Reform Act of 1832, however, much changed. Party leaders' control over the House of Commons' agenda increased markedly (Cox 1987, ch. 6). Moreover, after the abolition of 57 so-called "rotten" boroughs in 1832, the percentage of constituencies where patronal peers controlled nominations fell from over 50% to 14% (Sack 1980), thereby opening a window of opportunity for party leaders to increase their role. Party-affiliated clubs began to

maintain lists of suitable candidates and would-be nominees quickly sought to get onto those lists. By the first post-reform parliament, over 80% of all MPs had club affiliations, and this number stabilized at around 95% by the parliament of 1837-41 (Thevoz 2018).[6]

Given that party leaders in the House of Commons faced a weaker Lords' veto, controlled the legislative agenda more fully, and wielded greater influence over members' nominations, constructing responsible parties became more feasible. After 1832, leaders began to regularly announce (some of) their legislative goals in the Queen's Speech at the opening of each parliament; and party cohesion was soon comparable to that attained in the US Congress during the period of strong Speakers (1890-1910) (Lowell 1902; Brady, Cooper and Hurley 1979; Cox 1987; Eggers and Spirling 2016).

However, the minority party in the UK did not systematically *oppose* the government's legislative agenda. For example, Conservative leaders cooperated with the Liberal government in the 1830s to thwart the radical wing of the government's supporters, Peelites cooperated with both Liberals and Conservatives in the 1840s and 1850s (Cox 1987, ch. 4), and the two major parties cooperated in the 1880s to thwart the obstructionist tactics of the Irish Nationalists (Dion 1997; Koß 2015). That said, no study has quantified the extent of bipartisan

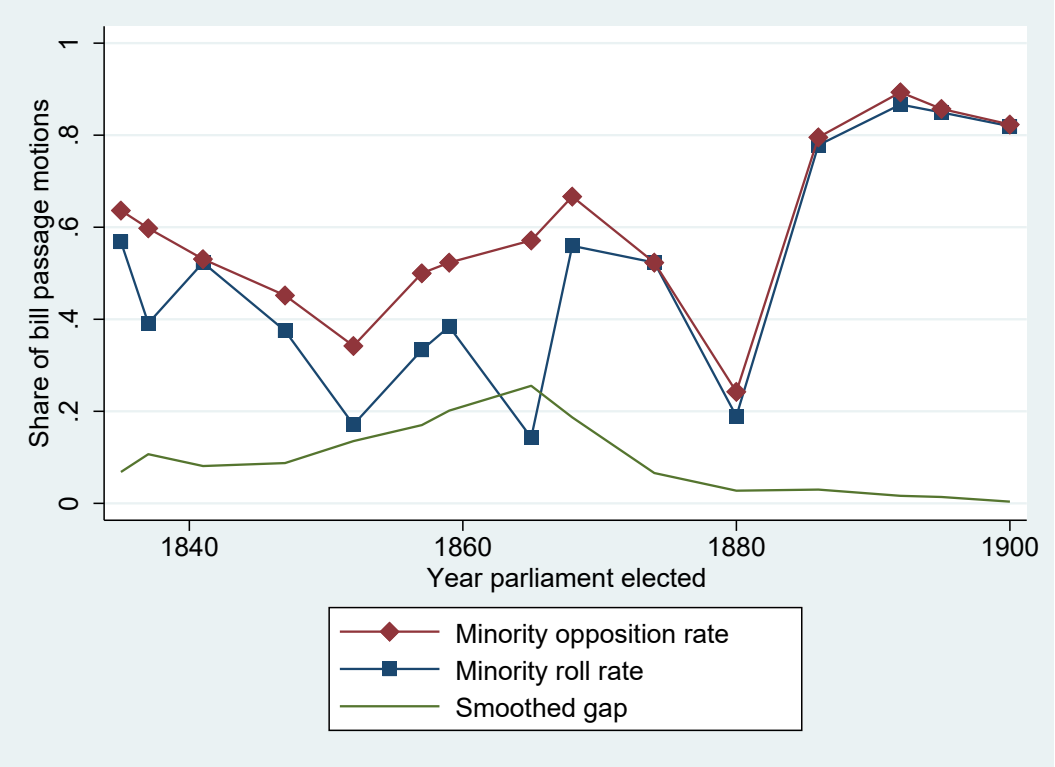
[6] The Lords' veto power also weakened after 1832, since the monarch's threat to create a large number of new peers during consideration of the reform bill had set a precedent for getting around the upper chamber's obstruction. However, the Lords' legislative power was not formally amended until 1911.

cooperation in the UK over time, nor documented when the minority party began to (unsuccessfully) oppose virtually everything the government proposed.

The massive data collection effort recently undertaken by Eggers and Spirling (2014) allows one to fill these lacunae for the period after 1836, the year in which the House of Commons first began to publish its division lists (i.e., lists of how each member voted in recorded votes). Figure 2 shows the minority opposition rate and the minority roll rate for each parliament, from the one elected in 1835 to the one elected in 1900. The analysis focuses on the government's "bill passage motions," in order to provide statistics comparable to the US minority roll rates conventionally calculated for "final passage votes."[7] I end the analysis with the parliament that adopted the "railway timetable" rules that finalized the government's stranglehold on the legislative agenda (Eggers and Spirling 2014b).

[7] I count the following as bill passage motions: third readings, motions to pass the bill, motions that particular clauses "stand part of the bill", supply motions, and motions to ingross. Bill passage motions are attributed to the government if a majority of MPs from the governing party supports passage. In practice, over 80% of these motions were whipped by the government by the 1840s, with that figure increasing slightly over the rest of the century.

Figure 2: Opposing the government's bill passage motions, 1835-1900



Author's calculations from Eggers and Spirling (2014a).

Notes: The upper curve (connecting the diamonds) shows the share of the government's bill passage motions that the minority party opposed; the lower curve (connecting the squares) shows the share they *unsuccessfully* opposed (aka the minority roll rate). The lowest curve is the smoothed gap between the upper and lower curves. The short parliament of 1885-86 is not displayed.

The upper curve (connecting the diamonds) shows the share of the government's bill passage motions that the minority party opposed. Since the minority cannot be rolled if they agree with the government, the upper curve provides an upper bound on the minority roll rate. As can be seen, this upper bound was fairly low: the minority disagreed with only 50-60% of

the government's agenda for most parliaments prior to the third reform act (1884). In the parliament of 1880, the disagreement rate fell even further, due in part to a series of bills dealing with Ireland on which both major British parties cooperated. The substantial increase in the minority roll rate after the third reform act, to the modern range of 80-90%, was produced mainly by an increase in the minority's rate of opposition, rather than by an improvement in the government's ability to pass motions in the teeth of opposition.

The lower curve (connecting the squares) shows the share of the government's bill passage motions that the minority *unsuccessfully* opposed. In other words, it gives the minority roll rate. The smoothed gap between the upper and lower curves (shown at the bottom) reflects how often the government failed to pass a motion that the minority opposed. After the second reform act (1867), this gap was always small; the government could marshal enough cohesion to pass its agenda. Before this, however, the minority was more successful—for example, in the parliament of 1865 discussed below. In many cases in which the minority defeated government bill proposals, it did so partly by out-mobilizing the government—flooding parliament with supporters when it suspected that majority-party MPs would be dining or otherwise occupied. However, government indiscipline was also a contributing factor in most government defeats.

In summary, we can answer the question posed in this section about *when* the government began to pass most of its agenda in the teeth of minority opposition. It did so soon after the third reform act (1884). The question of *why* this occurred can be divided into two parts, discussed in the next two sections.

Why did minority parties begin to oppose?

Dewan and Spirling (2011) elaborate a model in which (i) the majority party controls the legislative agenda; and (ii) each party's supporters have diverse "ideal points" on a single dimension of left-right conflict. They show that, under these conditions, the minority party's leaders would prefer their followers to cast a "strategic no," opposing everything the government proposes. The advantage of this is that, when denied the support of minority moderates, government leaders are forced to moderate their bills.

To illustrate, consider a leftist government seeking to change a right-of-center status quo. If the government can rely on opposition moderates, it can push a bill acceptable to the chamber median. However, if it can rely solely on its own followers' votes, some of whom are further to the right than the most moderate members of the opposition, then the best bill the government can pass will necessarily be to the right of the chamber median (and thus more palatable to the opposition).

Consistent unified opposition can also affect how the government chooses to legislate. In terms of the three-way choice depicted in Figure 1, unified opposition raises the cost and lowers the benefit of a partisan bill, deflecting the government to a bipartisan bill or no bill at all.

Dewan and Spirling's model predicts that the combination of government agenda control and internally heterogeneous parties should induce the minority party's leaders to push for a "strategic no" from their followers. Since the majority party's control over the agenda improved sharply in the 1830s (Cox 1987), and then again in the 1880s (Dion 1997), and since both these improvements were implemented when there was still considerable intra-party

heterogeneity in preference (see Figure 3 below), Dewan and Spirling's model implies that minority-party leaders should have perceived a strategic incentive to oppose the government in the 1830s, and an even greater incentive to oppose beginning in the 1880s. Consistent with these observations, the minority opposition rate (see the upper curve in Figure 2) is high relative to US standards by the 1830s, and then increases to modern UK standards by the second half of the 1880s.

Why could governing parties withstand weakest-link attacks?

Well before the minority began to oppose consistently, the majority built up its disciplinary infrastructure. British parties established their first recognizably modern whip organizations in the early 1830s (Cox 1992; Sainty and Cox 1997) and soon achieved party cohesion levels comparable to those their US counterparts managed during the heyday of strong Speakers (1890-1910). What resources could British leaders and whips deploy to convince MPs to support their party, should they face threats of electoral retribution from bill opponents?

Famously, British leaders did *not* dispense pork barrel projects and protective tariffs, two staples of the 19th century American political landscape. Backbenchers could not even *propose* the expenditure of public funds or the levy of new taxes. Only the Chancellor of the Exchequer could make such proposals and MPs' amendments were restricted to cutting the requested expenditures or taxes; they could neither increase nor re-allocate them.

British leaders did involve themselves to some extent with campaign finance (Thevoz 2018). However, no one claims that such assistance contributed more than marginally to maintaining party discipline in the 19th century (cf. Kam and Newson 2021).

Instead of these American-style resources, British party leaders wielded a trio of powers unavailable to their compatriots across the Atlantic. First, majority-party leaders could declare that certain issues were matters of confidence and that the government would resign if defeated—thereby increasing both government and opposition cohesion (Huber 1996; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). Second, leaders could reward party loyalists with advancement into the cabinet (Eggers and Spirling 2016) and/or with peerages. Third, leaders could use their influence over nominations to punish dissidents and reward loyalists (Cox and Nowacki 2021). Let's consider each of these powers in turn.

Parliamentarism and party cohesion

The ability of UK governments to declare issues to be matters of confidence is the most widely articulated reason to expect British parties to be more cohesive than their American counterparts. However, I shall show that party cohesion improved substantially on an important subset of divisions without any change in how often confidence was invoked.

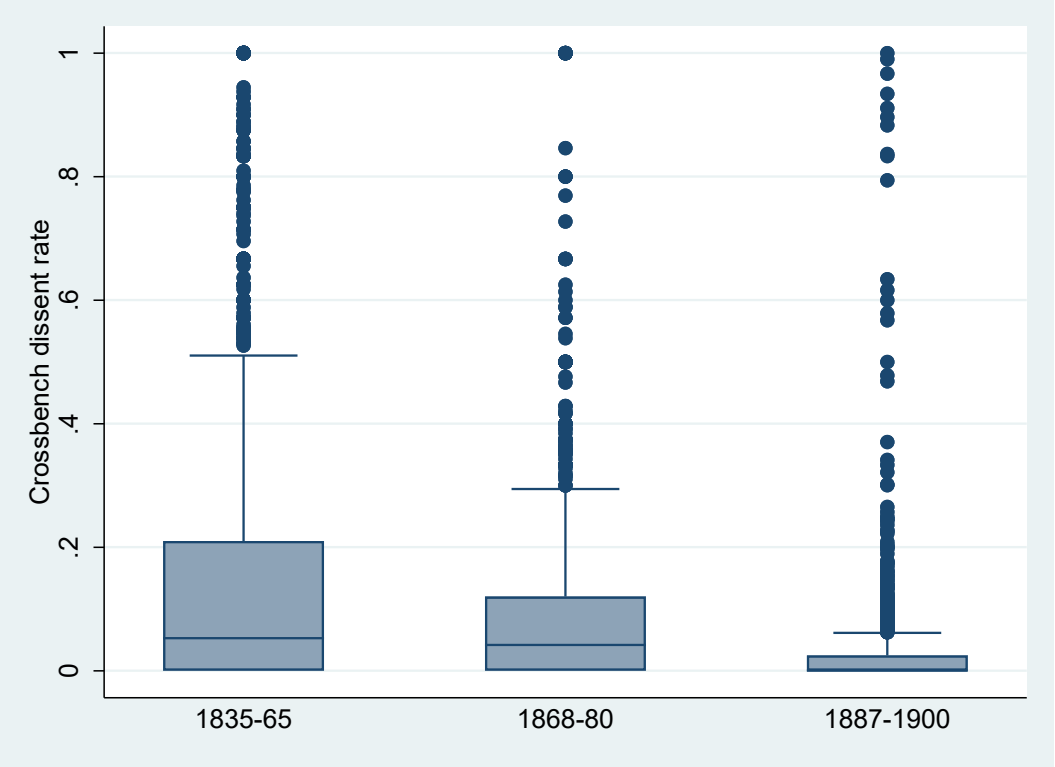
To show this, I consider how all British MPs sitting in the fifteen parliaments elected between 1835 and 1900 voted on all bill passage motions *whipped* by the government and *opposed* by the opposition.[8] For each sitting MP in each parliament, I coded their *crossbench*

[8] I count a division as *whipped* when at least one government whip (or, in the earlier years, relevant minister) acted as teller; and as *opposed* when a majority of the minority party's voting members voted against the government. Here and in all subsequent analyses, I exclude MPs sitting for Irish constituencies, where the party system was somewhat different, and a few MPs who switched parties during their careers. I also exclude the short parliament of 1885-86.

dissent rate: the share of the time that they voted with the other party on one of the government's whipped and opposed bill passage motions.

As Figure 3 shows, between the first and second reform acts about one quarter of MPs voted with the other party on over 20% of opposed bill passage motions. Between the second and third reform acts, in contrast, only a handful of MPs dissented this often; and the third quartile of dissent is cut roughly in half. After the third reform act, crossbench dissent on whipped bill passage motions became extremely rare.

Figure 3: Box-and-whisker plots of crossbench dissent rates, by era



Author's calculations from Eggers and Spirling (2014a).

The declining dissent documented in Figure 3 cannot be attributed to governments invoking confidence more often, since they did not do so on *any* of the motions considered.

Confidence and no confidence motions were rare and, when connected to a bill, came earlier in the legislative process—e.g., when the bill was first introduced or at key amendment stages.

Since the number of multi-member districts declined at the second and third reform acts, one might suspect that this was related to the decline in dissidence. However, MPs' dissent rates did not change when they shifted from single-member to multi-member districts (see Appendix A), so it seems unlikely that the shift in the composition of district magnitudes played a major role.

Nor can one attribute the downward trend in Figure 3 to governments whipping divisions more often, since the analysis focuses only on whipped votes. That said, whipping may have had a stronger influence on MPs' behavior after the second and third reform acts.

To understand why the potency of whipping might have changed over time, consider what an MP stood to lose if they dissented from their party's position on one of the government's bill passage motions. Such dissent might reduce party leaders' willingness to help MPs who sought re-nomination, re-election and promotion to cabinet; and may also have risked leaders' punitive action (e.g., de-selection or ejection from the cabinet). In the rest of this section, I argue that British party leaders' significantly increased their control over their followers' nominations after the second and third reform acts; and that this should have increased whip potency, helping to explain the declining dissidence shown in Figure 3.

Increasing nomination control

Party leaders' influence over their followers' nominations increased after the second and third reform acts mainly because each act significantly expanded suffrage rights—making it increasingly difficult for candidates to secure nominations via non-partisan mechanisms.

Between the first and second reform acts, Gash (1977, Appendix D) reckons that patronal peers still controlled nominations to 73 seats in 52 constituencies and notes that nominations could be purchased in various other constituencies. By making constituencies too large for a single patron to control or for a single candidate to purchase, the second and third reform acts sharply reduced the supply of both patronal and venal constituencies. A corollary effect was that new local party associations were founded throughout the country after the second reform act (Cox 1987, pp. 38-39), thereby bringing more, and eventually all, constituencies within the ambit of the parties' existing screening systems (which they ran through party-affiliated clubs in London).

Perhaps recognizing the new opportunities that suffrage expansion afforded, the Liberals' chief whip incorporated the electoral organization of the party into his office immediately after the second reform act, forming a unified party headquarters (Thompson 1948). Subsequently, in addition to whipping divisions in the House of Commons, the chief whip aimed to find candidates "for all seats that were not Tory preserves" (p. 192) and to disburse the party's electoral funds (p. 194).

Contemporary scholars such as Ostrogorski (1902, p. 609) viewed the party organizational changes implemented after the second reform act as setting up a system in which deselection was used to punish dissent (though see Ranney 1965). Here, I stress that nominations could also be used to reward loyalty. In particular, leaders could issue a standing promise to "take care" of MPs who voted with their party against their constituents' interests, should their loyalty result in their defeat at the next election. This standing promise could influence MPs' behavior on any roll call on which they faced pressure to dissent, without the

need to negotiate a bill-specific side payment. Moreover, the promise was credible. First, the total number of MPs likely to lose their seats *due to their support for the party's agenda* would, in any given election, be limited—making payouts manageable. Second, to keep their promise, leaders needed only to arrange matches between local nominating committees seeking candidates and candidates seeking nominations—which is precisely the role they played (Thevoz 2018; Cox and Nowacki 2021).

How increasing nomination control affected the wages of dissent

How did party leaders' increasing nomination control affect the typical MP's expected loss due to crossbench dissent?[9] As noted above, this expected loss had both office and electoral components, and I will consider each of them in turn.

As regards office losses, some members hoped eventually to receive cabinet posts and/or peerages. Such hopes of promotion could motivate early-career MPs to be loyal—but only to the extent that they believed (i) loyalty in whipped divisions would help realize their hopes (on which see Cox 1987; Eggers and Spirling 2016); (ii) they would be re-elected often enough to receive their just reward; and (iii) their party had a reasonable chance of forming a government.

Not much appears to change as regards the parties' chances of forming governments. In every decade from the 1830s to the 1890s, the major parties alternated in power. However,

[9] The most comprehensive investigation to date (Eggers and Spirling 2016) does not find a significant increase over time in party leaders' ability to screen out potential dissidents before they became nominees. Thus, I focus here on leaders' efforts to deter dissent among elected MPs.

leaders' increasing ability to influence their followers' nominations should have *complemented* their pre-existing control over cabinet promotion—since promises of future cabinet promotion would have been more valuable if MPs' believed they could secure nominations in safe constituencies. Thus, as leaders' nomination power increased, the rewards of loyalty would have increasingly diverged from the penalties of disloyalty.[10]

Increasing leaders' nomination control should also have increased MPs' expected seat losses due to dissidence. As leaders' power expanded, their responses to members' voting records could range from actively helping members to find good nominations and campaign finance, to withholding such help, to actively seeking to de-select a member or deprive them of funding. At the same time, dissidents had fewer places where they could continue to win re-nomination and re-election without the assistance, of central party leaders, due to the disappearance of patronal and venal constituencies.[11]

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[10] All that said, hopes of promotion to cabinet could influence the behavior only of would-be ministers, who made up a relatively small share in a parliament with over 600 members (Benedetto and Hix 2007).

[11] What if, whenever a vote was whipped, there was some probability p that the government would resign if defeated? Implicit threats of this kind would force dissidents to consider the policy losses they would suffer, if the government were replaced by the opposition. Such policy losses, as Benedetto and Hix (2007) have pointed out, depend on an MP's ideological location relative to the two main parties. To the extent that British party leaders used their expanding nomination control to weed out candidates who were roughly indifferent between the two

Crossbench dissents and electoral outcomes, 1835-1900

Did British party leaders in fact use their influence over nominations to punish dissidents and reward loyalists? Previous work shows that leaders used their influence in this fashion at two important career stages. First, they rewarded candidates who began their careers by contesting the other party's safe seats—typically a losing proposition—with promotions to more winnable constituencies (Lloyd 1965; Cox and Nowacki 2021). Second, leaders regularly found new seats for MPs who accepted office in the government but lost the mandatory by-election that their acceptance triggered (Cox and Nowacki 2021). In this section, I consider whether MPs who were more loyal to their parties were less likely to retire and more likely to secure nominations—and victories—in new constituencies.

The analysis again focuses on the parliaments elected between 1835 and 1900. For each MP *j* sitting in each parliament, I coded a variable, $NextWin_{jt}$, indicating *j*'s status in the next parliament. If *j* did not win re-election to the next parliament, then $NextWin_{jt} = 0$. If *j* won re-election in the same constituency, then $NextWin_{jt} = 1$. Finally, if *j* won re-election in a new constituency, then $NextWin_{jt} = 2$.

One approach is to estimate linear probability models predicting (i) each MP's chance of exiting parliament (rather than returning); and (ii) each MP's chance of winning in a new

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parties, the fraction of elected members who would suffer a policy loss when their leaders fell from power would naturally have increased after the later reform acts. Thus, increasing nomination control would also have increased the potency of invoking the government's confidence.

constituency (rather than exiting or returning for the same constituency). I also estimate these models using logit, finding similar results (reported in Appendix B).

Another estimation approach is to consider re-election in the same constituency as the baseline category, and use a multinomial logit model to investigate how crossbench dissent affected an MP's probability of either failing to win re-election ($NextWin_{jt} = 0$) or winning re-election in a new constituency ($NextWin_{jt} = 2$). On the one hand, I expect higher crossbench dissent rates to be associated with deselection and/or less assistance from the party in the general election, thereby increasing the probability of failing to win re-election. On the other hand, crossbench dissent should make the leadership less likely to help an MP find a new, winnable constituency.[12]

Table 1 shows the results of running all models separately for the two major parties, in each case controlling for year fixed effects, national fixed effects (England, Scotland, and Wales), and an indicator for borough constituencies. Among other things, year fixed effects will control for national swings against (or for) a particular party in a particular election year. Scottish and Welsh MPs were on average less mobile than English MPs, something that the national fixed effects allow the model to accommodate. Conservatives in borough

[12] Some MPs, especially in the earlier parliaments, voted on few whipped and opposed bill passage motions (or none at all). To mitigate the loss of data caused by low whipping and attendance rates in the earliest parliaments, I computed crossbench dissent rates on all of the government's bill passage motions resulting in party votes, regardless of whether they were whipped.

constituencies were much more likely to be making early-career forays into enemy territory—and thus more likely to lose or to move to a new constituency at the next election. The errors are clustered at the MP level.

Table 1: Crossbench dissent and electoral outcomes, 1835-1900

	Effect of crossbench dissidence on			
	Not winning the next election		Winning the next election in a new constituency	
	Linear probability model	Multinomial logit model	Linear probability model	Multinomial logit model
Liberals	0.22*** (.05)	1.16*** (0.2)	-0.06*** (.02)	-1.29*** (0.4)
Conservatives	0.07 (.06)	0.64** (0.3)	0.002 (.03)	-0.08 (0.6)

*** p value < .01 ** p value < .05

Notes:

(1) Linear probability models predict the probability that an MP will not win the next election (column 2); or will move to another constituency and win (column 4). The models were run separately for each party and include year fixed effects, country fixed effects, and an indicator for borough constituencies. Errors clustered by MP.

(2) The multinomial logit model had winning re-election in the same constituency as the baseline category, and predicts the probability that an MP will either not win the next election or will move to another constituency and win. The models were run separately for each party and include year fixed effects, country fixed effects, and an indicator for borough constituencies. Errors clustered by MP.

The results show that, in both parties, more dissident MPs were less likely to win another term. For the Liberals, this effect is significant regardless of how the model is estimated. For the Conservatives, only the multinomial logit result is statistically significant. Since the multinomial model asks whether an MP was more likely to exit rather than stay in the same constituency, while the linear probability model asks whether an MP was more likely to exit rather than stay in parliament, the results suggest that Conservative dissidents were more successful in finding new constituencies when their behavior displeased their existing constituents. This is consistent with historians' accounts that describe local Conservative elites as still wielding considerable influence over nominations, independent of the party's leaders, in the remaining small constituencies after the first reform act (Gash 1977).

The effects on exit are substantial. Increasing a Liberal MP's crossbench dissent rate from 0% to 50% (about two and a half standard deviations in the era between the first and second reform acts) would increase their probability of not winning a seat at the next election (rather than continuing in the same constituency) by 0.21, which is large relative to the baseline probability of 0.34.[13]

[13] One might expect that MPs differed in the level of dissent they could exhibit with impunity. For example, early-career MPs might have been put on a shorter leash by party leaders than late-career MPs. In Appendix B, I use linear probability models to show that early-career Liberals' continuance in parliament was more strongly (negatively) associated with their dissent rates than was the case for late-career Liberals. However, the difference in the effect between the two career stages is not statistically significant. Although late-career Liberals were more

The results in Table 1 also show that more dissident *Liberals* were significantly less likely to move to new constituencies (and win) than their more loyal colleagues. Increasing a Liberal MP's crossbench dissent rate from 0% to 50% would decrease their probability of winning a seat in a new constituency at the next election (relative to staying in the same constituency) by 0.17, which is large relative to the baseline probability of making such a move (.081). This is consistent with the idea that Liberal leaders more actively sought new constituencies for more loyal followers. No significant effect is observed for Conservative MPs, however, which may reflect the party's factionalization during much of the period studied.[14]

One might expect that MPs who involuntarily left office would be particularly likely to seek their party leaders' help in arranging transfers to other constituencies. However, careerist MPs became more and more likely to switch constituencies during their careers, even when they had won. As Cox and Nowacki (2021) show, members were increasingly determined to move to constituencies that were safer for their party, as soon as they could. Thus, transfers were by no means concentrated among those exiting parliament involuntarily. That said, among the (relatively small) subset of MPs defeated at by-elections after accepting government office, almost all seem to have been saved by their parties.

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loyal on average, there was still enough variation among them that one can detect the effect of dissent on their continuation in parliament.

[14] When a party had to keep two factions happy, it would have to "save" proportionate shares of the two factions' members, regardless of their relative loyalty.

I attribute these statistical associations between crossbench dissent and electoral outcomes to leaders seeking to promote the careers of more loyal MPs. Even if departing MPs were replaced by candidates drawn from a fixed distribution, leaders' efforts would lower their followers' dissent rates over time.

Looking more closely at the parliament elected in 1865, one can flesh out the relationship in more substantive political terms. First, recall that Figure 2 showed that the government suffered an unusually large number of disappointments in pushing its agenda in that parliament. Second, note that an unusually large number of MPs moved to new constituencies in the next general election—because most district boundaries were redrawn via the second reform act and its associated boundaries act. Thus, in this particular election, many MPs were in the market for new constituencies and the government had an unusually strong incentive to discriminate between those who had and had not been loyal. Statistically, the result was a particularly strong association between crossbench dissent in 1865-67 and outcomes at the election of 1868. In his detailed study of the second reform act, Kam (2014a) has shown that many MPs who opposed the secret ballot retired rather than seek re-election in the new constituencies created in connection with that reform. This was due in part to the popularity of the ballot with the newly enfranchised voters and in part to the Liberal leadership's decision to support the ballot, meaning that finding new seats for anti-ballot Whigs was not something they were eager to do.

The responsibility deficit in the US

Putting aside the normative debate over its desirability, one can ask a positive question: Why has the US never had a consistent pattern of the majority proposing, the minority

opposing, and the majority prevailing?[15] The theoretical preconditions for such an outcome are the majority's control of the legislative agenda, the minority's standing decision to oppose, and the majority's consistent ability to maintain party cohesion in the teeth of weakest-link attacks. Let's consider how each of these ingredients has varied over time in the US.

Majority agenda control

To illustrate the role of agenda power, consider the three points in congressional history at which the House Speaker's control over the agenda has shifted sharply: (1) the adoption of Reed's rules in 1890 (Cox and McCubbins 2005, ch. 4); (2) the revolt against Speaker Cannon in 1910 (Sin 2015, ch. 6), which de-centralized agenda power within the majority party; and (3) the re-centralization of agenda power in the mid-1970s (Rohde 1991). Using the data in Cox and McCubbins (2005, Table 5.1), one can compute the average roll rate just before and after these various shifts in the rules. Comparing the last six Congresses before adoption of Reed's rules (45th–50th) to the first six after (51st–56th), one finds a *doubling* of the minority roll rate, from 27% to 55%. Comparing the last five Congresses before the revolt against Cannon (57th–61st) to the first five after (62nd–66th), one finds a *near-halving* of the minority roll rate, from 57% to 30%. Comparing the last six Congresses before the beginning of the 1970s reforms (88th–93rd) to the first six after the completion of these reforms (96th–101st), one finds a

[15] For several perspectives on the normative merits of Westminster-style governance, see for example Martin and Vanberg (2011), Rosenbluth and Shapiro (2018), and Chapman (2021).

doubling of the minority roll rate, from 15% to 32%.[16] In other words, girding the Speaker with agenda power is associated with a more partisan approach to legislation and higher minority roll rates, while de-centralizing such power within the majority party is associated with a more bipartisan approach and a lower minority roll rate.

Minority opposition

After the 1970s re-centralization of agenda power in the hands of the Speaker, Newt Gingrich led a decade-long and ultimately successful effort in the 1980s to convince his colleagues to make a standing decision to oppose (Lee 2016). Thus, the first two elements of responsible party government were in place when the Republicans' historic victory in the 1994 midterms intensified inter-party competition (Bonica and Cox 2018). Nonetheless, the majority party has subsequently struggled to fulfill the last condition—the consistent ability to pass legislation relying only on its own members (Curry and Lee 2019, 2020). Why?

The high cost of leveling strategies in the US

The cost of leveling strategies is significantly greater in the US than the UK for two main reasons. First, the US has three constitutional veto players (the House, the Senate and the President) whereas the UK has since the Parliament Act of 1911 had only one (the House of Commons). Thus, defenders of the status quo in the US can "venue shop." They can explore

[16] In the transitional 94th and 95th Congresses, the minority roll rate was 25%. See Table 6.1 in Cox and McCubbins (2005) for a more extensive analysis of how minority roll rates responded to rules changes.

the cost of a weakest-link attack in the House, the Senate and the Presidency, and pick the venue in which the costs look lowest and the chances of success highest.[17]

A second, and perhaps even more important factor increasing the cost of leveling strategies in the US is that majority-party leaders must typically compensate their followers on a per-bill basis, using scarce resources (spending projects and campaign donations) that are paid out even if the electoral threat does not materialize. US leaders cannot make the government's continuation in office contingent on the outcome of legislative votes, cannot promise to promote members into cabinet positions, and cannot threaten to deselect dissidents.[18] These various deficits make it necessary to build coalitions bill by bill.

Assuming that the cost of financing pork barrel projects is convex increasing, as is the cost of financing campaign donations, each partisan bill makes it more difficult for party leaders to push a partisan bill on the next issue. The convex increasing costs of compensating moderates may be an important reason that the minority roll rate has had a persistent ceiling in the US.

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[17] This point about "venue shopping" resonates with Sin's (2015) general analysis of the profound ways in which inter-cameral and inter-branch relations affect legislative organization.

[18] The closest analog to promotion to cabinet in the US would be promotion to committee chairs. However, for most of the period under study, committee chairs were awarded based on seniority and—due to the factional split in the Democratic party—the threshold party loyalty required of chairs was quite low (Cox and McCubbins 1993).

While the cost of defending against weakest-link attacks is generally high for US party leaders, pushing them toward bipartisanship, the costs are not prohibitive. Thus, cost variations from one Congress to another can significantly affect the minority roll rate. To illustrate the latter point, consider how the majority party's size and homogeneity, as well as its resource endowments, affect its legislative strategy.

Variations in the majority party's size and homogeneity

Curry and Lee (2019, 2020) find that minority roll rates over the period 1973-2016 have been systematically higher only when the majority party is unusually large, unusually unified, and in control of both chambers and the presidency. These are precisely the conditions that should make a partisan strategy more resistant to weakest-link attacks. Indeed, greater internal homogeneity equalizes the cost of prying off votes; and greater size increases the total cost of a successful weakest-link attack.

Studying the period 1973-2004, Harbridge (2015) finds that when majorities are larger and districts are more sorted (another measure of the majority's internal homogeneity), partisan bills are more likely to receive floor attention. In other words, the majority party leadership is more willing to schedule partisan bills, given that the prospects of defending their passage coalitions are more favorable.

Conclusion

Advocates of "responsible party government" want parties to announce their legislative goals and then be able to pass them, if they secure power, on the strength of their own members' votes. In this paper, I consider why UK majority parties have closely approximated these conditions for responsibility since the 1880s, while US majority parties have never approximated them closely and now labor under a considerable responsibility deficit. I provide

the first systematic evidence on when the British opposition began to offer across-the-board opposition to the government's agenda and when the majority became able to routinely pass bills on the strength of its own members' votes, while exploring the role that leaders' control of the legislative agenda and of members' nominations played in these developments.

As regards the contrast between the two systems, I argue that it has always been more costly for US than for UK party leaders to defend legislative majorities against weakest-link attacks because they have much less control over parliamentary nominations and cabinet appointments. US leaders must offer per-bill compensation to their moderates, paid in federal outlays and campaign contributions, and the marginal cost of financing these side payments increases with the total amount previously provided. In contrast, UK leaders can offer a per-parliament promise to their loyalists—to find new constituencies for them in the event of their defeat and to promote their careers more generally.

In statistical terms, the differences between the two systems shows up most clearly in minority roll rates. In the UK, the minority typically opposes most of the government's agenda and almost always loses, resulting in minority roll rates that have been well above 80% since the late 1880s. In the US, the minority has not offered consistent opposition, and the majority has pursued partisan tactics only on selected bills, resulting in (i) lower minority roll rates; and (ii) more variable minority roll rates that fluctuate with the majority's size, homogeneity and resource endowments.

Scholars have long recognized that the US constitution—presidential, bicameral and federal—makes it hard to change status quo policies and muddies responsibility for legislative outcomes (Fiorina 1980). I have highlighted another impediment to party responsibility:

leaders' lack of control over their followers' careers. In the UK, I have argued that leaders acquired increasing influence over nomination during the 19th century and used it to promote loyalists' careers, eventually leading to the modern British pattern of minority opposition and majority cohesion. In the US, I have argued that party leaders' lack of nomination control has forced majorities to adopt more bipartisan approaches to legislation; and, when combined with decentralization of campaign finance and reduced control over federal expenditure, has also promoted legislative inefficiency and failure (Rosenbluth and Shapiro 2019; Curry and Lee 2019, 2020; Popkin 2021).

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Online Appendix
Comparing "responsible party government" in the US and the UK

Appendix A: District magnitude and crossbench dissent rates

Since the number of multi-member districts declined at each reform act, one might think that this downward shift in district magnitude contributed to the decline in crossbench dissent rates documented in Figure 3. To explore this possibility, I regressed each MP's crossbench dissent rate in each parliament on a parliament fixed effect, a member fixed effect, and an indicator equal to 1 for multi-member districts (and 0 for single-member districts). The parliament fixed effect controls, among other things, for the size of the government's majority, which might affect its incentives to push its members for loyalty. The results reveal that serving in a multi-member district had a substantively trivial (coefficient = .002) and statistically insignificant (standard error = .013) effect on an MP's dissidence. There were 310 MPs who served in single-member and multi-member districts at different points in their careers, so there is enough power in this test to reveal an effect, were one to exist.

Appendix B: Crossbench dissent rates and electoral outcomes

Table B.1 below runs the linear probability model of Table 1 in the text for three subsets of the members of each party: all members; all early-career members (defined as those in their first, second or third terms); and all late-career members (those serving a fourth or higher term).

Table B.1: Crossbench dissent and electoral outcomes, 1835-1900

	Effect of crossbench dissidence on	
	Not winning the next election	Winning the next election in a new constituency
Liberals		
All	.22*** (.05)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Early career	.23*** (.05)	-0.06** (0.02)
Late career	.17** (.09)	-0.06* (0.04)
Conservatives		
All	0.067 (0.056)	0.002 (0.029)
Early career	0.063 (0.063)	0.017 (0.015)
Late career	0.079 (0.099)	-0.041 (0.029)

*** p value < .01 ** p value < .05

Notes: Linear probability model predicting probability that an MP will not win the next election (column 2). Linear probability model predicting probability that an MP will move to another constituency and win (column 3). The models were run separately for each party and include year fixed effects, country fixed effects, and an indicator for borough constituencies. Errors clustered by MP.

As noted in the text, dissidence seems to have been more costly, in terms of promoting exit from parliament, for early-career than for late-career Liberals. However, the difference is relatively small substantively and not statistically significant.

All linear probability results noted here or in the text also hold if a logit rather than a linear probability model is used to derive the estimates.