

Slave Revolts and Emancipation: Evidence from the British Empire

Gabriel Leon-Ablan*

King's College London

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Abstract

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire was the product of a parliamentary bargain between abolitionists and defenders of slavery. What role did enslaved people play in this process? This article uses a variety of identification strategies to show that slave revolts in the Caribbean helped secure parliamentary support for emancipation. In particular, members of parliament were more likely to support a plan that freed enslaved people and compensated slave owners when more of their constituents owned enslaved people in colonies that experienced revolts. Evidence from colonial archives supports an economic mechanism: revolts lowered the value of enslaved people, making the compensation-for-emancipation plan more appealing to slave owners. By changing the economic incentives of those with a financial stake in the system, enslaved resistance helped bring British Caribbean

*Department of Political Economy, King's College London, Strand Campus, Bush House NE, 30 Aldwych, London WC2B 4BG. Email: gabriel.leon_ablan@kcl.ac.uk. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for funding this project and to Rodrigo Martin Campanini for excellent research assistance. I wish to thank Leah Boustan, Ben Broman, Camilo Garcia-Jimeno, Francisco Garfias, Rick Hornbeck, Krzys Krakowski, Jean Lacroix, Gabriel Mesevage, Kevin O'Rourke and Didac Queralt for their helpful feedback. I am grateful to the participants of the 2024 Society for Institutional and Organizational Economics (SIOE) conference, the 2024 Yale-BCN workshop in Historical Political Economy, the 2024 Petralia Political Economy workshop, the 2024 USC Historical Political Economy workshop, APSA 2025, LACEA 2025, Cliometrics 2026 and seminar audiences at Brown, Duke, NYU, Northwestern, Paris-Saclay, Sciences Po and Yale for their very helpful comments.

slavery to an end. More broadly, these findings illustrate how popular mobilization and within-elite bargaining can interact to produce institutional change.

Keywords: slavery, abolition, emancipation, protest, revolts, social movements, new imperial history, British Empire.

1 Introduction

In the summer of 1833, Britain's parliament voted to abolish slavery in its Caribbean colonies. This was "the first time in world history that slavery had been eliminated by government fiat in a region with a predominantly slave population whose labor was critical to the economy" (Rugemer 2008, p.2). For decades, abolitionists and defenders of slavery had clashed in parliament, but after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the campaign to end slavery itself remained stalled. Yet after intense negotiations in the summer of 1833, the two sides agreed on an emancipation bill that passed the House of Commons unopposed. The success of this bill is usually attributed to the abolitionist campaign (Drescher 1977; Hochschild 2005; Hurwitz 1973; Figueroa and Fouka 2023), but the supporters of slavery had very good reasons, other than a change of heart, for supporting this legislation. The bill offered slave owners £20 million in compensation, equivalent to 5 percent of Britain's GDP in 1833, and it was negotiated soon after the largest and most destructive slave revolt in the history of the British Caribbean. This timing suggests a link between emancipation and resistance by enslaved people, a connection emphasized by an important body of historical work (Beckles 1988; Craton 1982a; Fergus 2013; Hart 1985; Matthews 2006).

What role did Caribbean slave revolts play in securing parliamentary support for emancipation? This question concerns the contribution of enslaved people to the abolition of slavery. It is also an instance of a broader issue: how popular mobilization and conflict among elites interact to produce institutional change. The article addresses this question using a framework in which two elites disagree over whether to reform an existing institution. Popular mobilization against the institution can disrupt economic activity, destroy assets, and increase the costs of security and repression, thereby reducing the value of the status quo. This loss in value makes the elite that benefits from the existing institution more willing to accept reform in exchange for compensation. The framework highlights a trade-off between the intensity of mobilization, the value of the status quo relative to the proposed reform, and the compensation required to secure an agreement.

Britain's 1833 emancipation settlement fits this framework: slavery was the status quo institution, emancipation was the proposed reform, and compensation was the payment made to slave owners. The framework suggests that slave revolts would have reduced the

value of enslaved people as property and raised the costs of running the plantation economy, making owners more willing to accept emancipation if compensation was sufficiently large. Two main empirical predictions follow from this argument. First, MPs should have been more likely to support compensated emancipation in constituencies where more residents owned enslaved people in colonies affected by revolts. Second, revolts should have lowered the value of slavery-related assets in the affected colonies.

To test these predictions, I use variation in exposure to Caribbean slave revolts across English and Welsh constituencies. I measure exposure as the number of local slave owners with enslaved people in colonies that experienced major revolts. I find that MPs were more likely to support abolition-related votes when they represented constituencies that were more exposed. The effect was large: in aggregate, exposure to slave revolts increased the predicted number of constituencies with at least one pro-emancipation MP by 58, equivalent to 30 percent of the sample. Moreover, constituencies with more exposed owners were more likely to have at least one MP shift from opposing emancipation to supporting it in the years leading up to 1833.

These findings raise two main identification concerns: the possible sorting of owners across constituencies and the endogeneity of slave revolts. I address these concerns in four ways. First, I show that constituencies with high exposure to slave revolts did not differ systematically from those with low exposure. Second, I restrict the analysis to owners with enslaved people in Jamaica, the colony with the largest enslaved population. I then compare owners whose enslaved people were located in revolt-affected parts of the island with owners whose enslaved people were located elsewhere in Jamaica. The location of enslaved people within the island is unlikely to have determined where their owners lived in England and Wales. Third, I use an instrumental variable strategy that exploits variation across colonies in the ethnic composition of enslaved populations, measured using the African embarkation ports from which enslaved people were transported. Fourth, applying the method in Oster (2019), I show that selection on unobservables would need to be implausibly large to explain away the results.

Having shown that slave revolts increased parliamentary support for emancipation, the paper turns to the hypothesized economic mechanism. For this, I collected archival data for Jamaica and Barbados. These data show that prices of enslaved people in Jamaica fell after the colony experienced a large revolt, while prices in Barbados were

unaffected. In Jamaica, this decline coincided with a fall in exports and a rise in military and police spending, which were financed through local taxes and the issue of new debt. This shows that slave revolts reduced the value of enslaved people and increased the cost of operating the slavery-based plantation economy, making compensated emancipation relatively more attractive.

To examine how the pro-slavery elite viewed compensated emancipation, I reviewed the correspondence of the West India Committee, the lobby group for slave owners and others tied to the plantation economy. The letters show that, by summer 1833, the Committee was prepared to accept emancipation in exchange for compensation and was working to secure the largest possible compensation package. I then connect this lobbying to parliamentary voting. Many candidates who did not pledge support for emancipation during the 1832 election later supported compensated emancipation, suggesting that their votes were not simply a response to public pressure. Consistent with this interpretation, slave revolts reduced pro-abolition petitioning in constituencies with many exposed owners, even as MPs from those constituencies became more likely to support compensated emancipation after the revolts. This pattern is more consistent with lobbying by slave owners than with increased public pressure for emancipation.

The final part of the paper addresses three related issues. First, it shows that the results I document were not simply a consequence of the electoral changes introduced by the Great Reform Act of 1832. Second, it uses the framework to explain why emancipation did not occur sooner: before the 1820s, slave revolts had been frequent but smaller; abolitionists did not adopt the goal of full emancipation until 1830; and slave owners became open to a negotiated settlement only after the large Baptist War revolt of 1831-32. Finally, the article concludes with a brief discussion of how the framework can help explain why compensated emancipation did not occur in the United States in the decades before the Civil War.

The article builds on historical scholarship that identifies resistance by enslaved people as an important force behind emancipation in the British Caribbean. Hart (1985) argues that Jamaican rebels accelerated emancipation by forcing the British government to bring forward the timetable for emancipation. Matthews (2006) shows how uprisings in Barbados, Demerara, and Jamaica informed the tactics of British abolitionists. Fergus (2013) argues that amelioration and abolitionism emerged as an imperial reform project

aimed at preserving colonial peace in the aftermath of Tacky's 1760 revolt in Jamaica. Brown (2020), in his study of this rebellion, argues for shifting the interpretation of these episodes from reactive disorder to organized military and political action. I extend this literature by providing econometric evidence that slave revolts contributed to emancipation and by developing and testing an economic mechanism that explains why.

This mechanism offers a revised version of the economic decline thesis advanced by Williams (1944). Building on Ragatz (1928), Williams argued that emancipation resulted from the decline of the British Caribbean sugar economies and Britain's transition toward industrial capitalism, developments that made slavery increasingly incompatible with British economic interests. My account is economic too, but identifies the source of decline in the actions of enslaved people themselves: their resistance eroded asset values and raised the costs associated with the slavery-based plantation system. Compensated emancipation reflected Britain's nineteenth-century practice of accommodating demands for institutional change through negotiated parliamentary compromise rather than revolutionary rupture (Gash 1979; Mandler 1990). This compromise was made possible by the convergence of an abolitionist movement willing to offer compensation, enslaved people whose revolts lowered the amount of compensation required by slave owners to accept emancipation, and slave owners who placed their economic interests above the defense of slavery. The paper therefore challenges conventional narratives of emancipation in the British Empire that focus exclusively on the role of the abolitionist movement.

This article contributes to a number of literatures in political science. First, existing work on institutional change often emphasizes either conflict and negotiation among elites (Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Przeworski 1991; North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009) or vertical conflict between elites and the masses (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2005; Boix 2003; Przeworski 2009). Other work examines how popular mobilization and elite bargaining interact to produce institutional change, highlighting how pressure from below can reshape elite negotiations (Bermeo 1997; Collier 1999; Wood 2000, 2001). This article illustrates how mobilization can facilitate elite agreement by reducing the economic value of the status quo institution. It also emphasizes the importance of compensation as a mechanism for overcoming the opposition of those who stand to lose from reform (Albertus 2015; Caselli and Gennaioli 2008; Goldin 1973).

Second, existing work on the political effects of protests, riots, and popular revolts shows that these episodes can shape electoral outcomes, concessions from political leaders, and institutional change (e.g., Madestam et al. 2013; Wasow 2020; Biggs and Andrews 2015; Mazumder 2018; Aidt and Franck 2015; Aidt and Leon 2016; Chenoweth and Stephan 2012; Wood 2000, 2001; Castañeda Dower et al. 2018; Acemoglu, Hassan, and Tahoun 2018). This article builds on this literature by identifying changes in asset values as a specific economic channel through which unrest can reshape elite behavior. More broadly, the findings show that popular mobilization need not pose a credible revolutionary threat; it can also produce political change by reducing the benefits elites derive from the status quo, especially when compensation is on offer.

Third, the article speaks to the literature on how asset values affect political behavior. Existing research shows that housing wealth affects preferences over redistribution, social insurance, and populist voting (Ansell 2014; Ansell and Adler 2019). Related work shows that financial asset ownership and financial-market exposure can shape political preferences over institutional reform and conflict (Jha 2015; Jha and Shayo 2019). The mechanism in this article also builds on work showing that conflict and political events are capitalized into asset prices: Besley and Mueller (2012) show that violence reduced house prices in Northern Ireland, while Calomiris and Pritchett (2016) use changes in slave prices to infer market expectations about emancipation and the US Civil War. A related literature shows that negative economic shocks, even when not directly tied to asset values, can affect political preferences and participation (Margalit 2013; Rosenstone 1982; Kern, Marien, and Hooghe 2015).

Finally, this article contributes to the recent resurgence in the study of slavery in both political science and economics. For example, there is a renewed debate on the relationship between slavery and industrialization (Berg and Hudson 2023; Derenoncourt 2025; Heblich, Redding, and Voth 2022), as well as a considerable body of work documenting the short and long-term consequences of slavery in different parts of the world (e.g., Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016, 2018; Bateman 2020; Beigelman 2024; Charnysh and Lall 2024; Seyler 2021). My contribution is to the question of emancipation; while much of the recent literature has focused on the abolition of serfdom (e.g., Buggle and Nafziger 2021; Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen 2015; Markevich and Zhuravskaya 2018) and emancipation in the United States and Brazil (Masera and Rosenberg 2023; Seyler and

Silve 2022), this article examines the British case and provides econometric evidence that resistance by enslaved people helped bring slavery in the British Caribbean to an end.

2 Mobilization and bargaining over institutional reform

Consider two elite groups bargaining over the reform of an institution. One group supports reform, while the other prefers the status quo. The elite that prefers the status quo will accept reform when the value of the reformed institution, together with any compensation on offer, exceeds the value it derives from the status quo. When an institution's value is economic, its worth reflects the present discounted value of the cash flows it generates, including returns from assets associated with it, net of the costs of ownership. This simple bargaining logic suggests that institutional change becomes more likely when the value of the status quo falls, when the expected value of the new institution rises, or when compensation increases.

Theories of institutional change that focus on the threat of revolution emphasize the first channel: mass mobilization can reduce the expected value of the status quo (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2005; Boix 2003; Przeworski 2009). Elite-bargaining accounts emphasize the second channel, explaining reform as the outcome of negotiated settlements in which institutional change becomes acceptable, or even attractive, to key elites (Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Przeworski 1991; North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). A third body of work emphasizes the role of compensation in making reform acceptable to groups that would otherwise oppose it (Albertus 2015; Caselli and Gennaioli 2008; Goldin 1973).

2.1 Mobilization, asset values and compensation

Mobilization can reduce the economic value of existing institutions in several ways. First, it may disrupt the income flows generated by the institution: strikes, protests, and unrest can slow or halt production, interrupt trade, or make ordinary economic activity more difficult (Abadie and Gardeazabal 2003; Ksoll, Macchiavello, and Morjaria 2023; Martin, Mayer, and Thoenig 2008; Mas 2008). Second, it can destroy or damage assets (Collins

and Margo 2007; Besley and Mueller 2012). Third, it can raise the costs of the institution by requiring greater spending on monitoring, policing, enforcement, or repression (Fenoaltea 1984; Grossman 1991; Hadden 2001; Lawrimore 2023; Wintrobe 1998). Finally, it may increase the perceived risk of future unrest, implying lower expected revenues and higher expected costs in the future (Barrett et al. 2024; Acemoglu, Hassan, and Tahoun 2018).

Mobilization does not need to threaten the regime with overthrow to shape elite incentives. Even a revolt that is quickly repressed may matter if it reduces the net returns to the status quo. When this happens, reform with compensation becomes relatively more attractive to the status-quo elite, and a compensation package that was previously insufficient may become enough to secure agreement. Whether mobilization produces institutional change therefore depends on a trade-off between the intensity of mobilization, the value of the alternative institution, and the compensation on offer. This trade-off helps explain when pressure from below is likely to generate institutional change.

2.2 Implications for the case of emancipation

The framework just outlined has implications for the case of emancipation in the British Empire. Abolitionists acknowledged in 1823 that compensation would be paid in the event of emancipation. Yet a successful emancipation bill came only in 1833, after Jamaica’s Baptist War of 1831-32, the largest slave revolt in the history of the British Caribbean. This followed another major revolt in Demerara, British Guiana, in 1823. Together, these revolts disrupted production and exports, destroyed property, led to the deaths of enslaved people, and were very expensive to repress. Slave owners could not easily avoid these costs because existing legislation severely restricted the removal of enslaved people from the colonies where they lived (Eltis 1972).¹

According to the framework, these revolt-related costs would have reduced the present discounted value of slavery-related assets. For slave owners in Britain, for whom the

¹ As in Boix (2003), asset immobility helped shape elite preferences over institutional change. In the case of emancipation, compensation offered a way to convert immobile and increasingly risky assets into a liquid payment, weakening slave owners’ opposition to institutional change.

consequences of revolt were primarily financial, this would have lowered the compensation required to make emancipation acceptable. As a result, a given compensation package could have secured broader slave-owner support, creating room for a bargain between abolitionists and defenders of slavery.

The argument can be summarized as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{slave revolts} &\stackrel{1}{\Rightarrow} \text{fall in asset values in affected colonies} \\ &\stackrel{2}{\Rightarrow} \text{increase in slave owner support for emancipation with compensation} \\ &\stackrel{3}{\Rightarrow} \text{MPs vote for emancipation in parliament} \quad (1) \end{aligned}$$

The first link captures the effect of slave revolts on asset values in affected colonies. The second shows that declining asset values shifted slave owners' attitudes toward compensated emancipation. The third connects slave owners' preferences to MPs' votes in parliament. This final link is plausible because local slave owners had both the incentive and the capacity to influence MPs. Many of them were connected by family, social, and commercial ties, and had direct access to MPs through which they could express their views. In contrast, the broader population faced greater obstacles to collective action: it was larger, more diffuse, and more vulnerable to the free-rider problem (Olson 1965). Moreover, because compensation was financed through government borrowing, its costs were spread across taxpayers and over time, reducing any individual's incentive to organize against it.

The framework yields four empirical predictions. First, MPs should have been more likely to support emancipation in constituencies with greater exposure to slave revolts, measured by the number of local residents who owned enslaved people in colonies that experienced revolts. These owners faced lower reservation values than those whose holdings were concentrated in unaffected colonies, and should therefore have responded differently to the same compensation offer. I test this claim using cross-constituency variation in exposure, which I define in section 4.

The remaining three predictions concern the mechanism. The second prediction is that slave revolts should have reduced asset values in the affected colonies; I examine this using archival data from Jamaica and Barbados. The third is that this fall in asset values should

have translated into greater support for compensated emancipation among the affected slave owners. I evaluate this implication using archival documents. Finally, if slave-owner preferences helped shape parliamentary behavior, MPs' votes should partly reflect this change in local slave-owner incentives. I test this using evidence from parliamentary elections and petitions to the House of Commons.

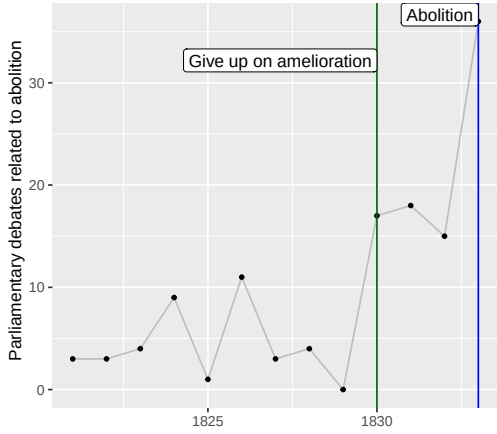
3 Historical background

The abolitionist movement was launched in 1787 with the creation of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. This group disbanded after the slave trade was abolished in 1807, but was revived in 1823 with a renewed membership and a new goal: the amelioration of the living and working conditions of enslaved people. This amelioration campaign was a failure, and from 1830 the movement adopted the goal of full emancipation (Gross 1980).

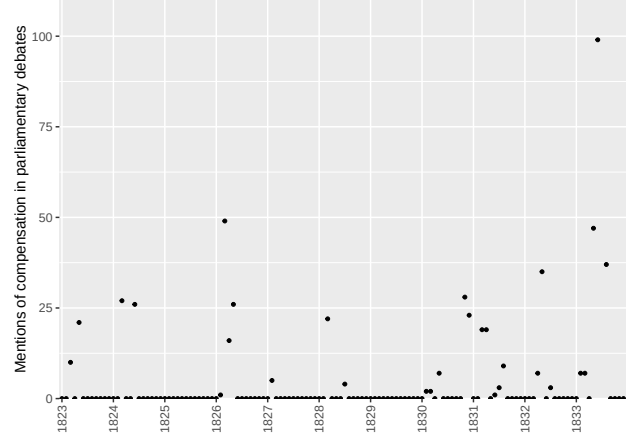
Emancipation required a substantial amount of parliamentary strategy, negotiation and compromise (Gross 1980). Abolitionist MPs introduced pieces of legislation almost every year, and as figure 1a shows, slavery and abolition were frequently debated in the House of Commons. Their efforts faced strong opposition from the West India interest in parliament, which represented planters and others who benefited from slavery. In 1833, under Thomas Fowell Buxton's leadership, parliament assembled a compensated-emancipation bill that commanded widespread support in the House of Commons. This bill received Royal Assent on 28 August 1833 and enslaved people were formally freed on August 1, 1834.

3.1 The slave owners

There were over 25,000 individuals who owned enslaved people in the Caribbean, including many absentee owners who lived in Britain. I focus on these absentees, whom Draper (2010) divides into three groups. The first consisted of small-scale owners who held only a handful of enslaved people and were often several steps removed from the individuals who had originally acquired them. Many of these small-scale owners had no land and rented the labor of their enslaved people to large plantations. A second group was made



(a) Number of parliamentary debates on abolition



(b) Monthly number of parliamentary speeches mentioning compensation for slave owners

FIGURE 1: Parliamentary debates on abolition. Panel (a) is constructed using data from Hansard. Panel (b) uses all parliamentary debates related to slavery in the database compiled by Eggers and Spirling (2014), where a speech is defined as an intervention by an MP during a debate.

up of large-scale owners, many of whom had become prominent members of British society. The third group consisted of mercantile owners, including London-based bankers and merchants who had taken ownership of enslaved people after borrowers defaulted on their loans. Figure 2a shows the distribution of owners in England and Wales.

3.2 Compensation

By 1823, Thomas Fowell Buxton and the abolitionist leadership had conceded that emancipation would involve some form of compensation (Matthews 2006, p.150). Slave owners expected compensation because they regarded enslaved people as their private property, and precedent dictated that owners should be compensated when the government interfered with individual property rights (Draper 2010, p.85). Figure 1b shows that after 1823 the question of compensation was frequently discussed in parliament. The compensation amount was subject to negotiation, but this does not appear to have been addressed until relatively late in the process (see section 7).

Compensation fluctuated in size and form between a loan and a grant, before it was agreed that owners would receive a total grant of £20 million. This was a very large sum: 5 percent of Britain’s GDP at the time, equivalent to £114 billion in today’s money. For many owners, compensation helped restore the liquidity of their investments in the

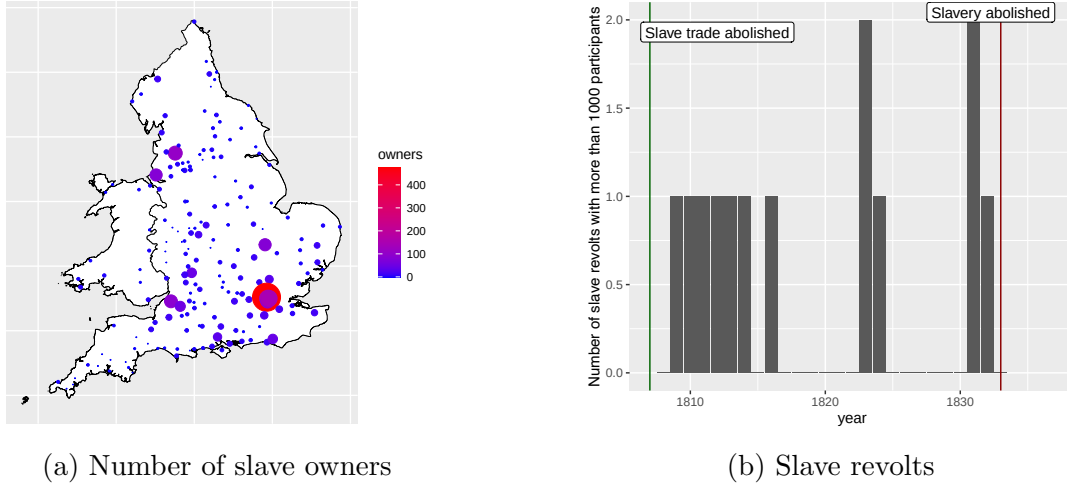


FIGURE 2: Slave owners and revolts. Panel (a) shows the distribution of slave owners across England and Wales, geolocated using data from UCL’s Legacies of British Slavery database. Panel (b) shows the number of slave revolts in the British Caribbean involving more than 1,000 participants, based on information from Craton (1982b).

Caribbean (Butler 1995, p.7). Draper (2010) explains that “the compensation process had in many cases restored value to slave-ownership or transformed a hard-to-realise value thousands of miles away into an immediately redeemable claim in Britain” (p.202). In this sense, compensation amounted to a bailout. Section F in the online appendix discusses compensation in more detail.

3.3 Slave revolts

Resistance to slavery in the British Caribbean was constant, ranging from everyday acts of defiance and small-scale unrest to major revolts involving thousands of participants (Craton 1982b, p.24). Figure 2b shows the timing of the largest slave revolts in the period leading to emancipation.² The motives behind these revolts are difficult to establish because written records are scarce (Matthews 2006, p.58). However, evidence from the trials of enslaved people and from missionary accounts points to several motives.³ At the most fundamental level, revolts were acts of self-liberation (Matthews 2006). More immediate triggers included physical violence, the absence of pay for work performed, and meager rations (p.76). Enslaved people were also aware, at least in broad terms,

² Online appendix B includes additional figures and provides a brief account of the largest slave revolts in the sample period.

³ Section 5.5 provides more discussion and some evidence on the causes of slave revolts.

that the abolition of slavery had become a salient issue in Britain (Williams 1944, p.193). For example, before the 1823 rebellion in British Guiana, a rumor circulated among enslaved people that the King of England had abolished slavery, but that local planters were refusing to grant them their freedom (Hochschild 2005, p.329). Slave owners in the Caribbean lived in fear of slave revolts and repressed resistance brutally (Matthews 2006, p.3). Major revolts were widely reported in the British press.⁴

Three conditions appear to have been necessary for a slave revolt to occur. First, enslaved people needed a popular and respected leader capable of organizing collective action (Beckles 1985). Second, large numbers of enslaved people had to coordinate their actions. Shared ethnic or religious ties could make this easier by creating trust and facilitating communication (Schuler 1970). Third, they had to conceal their plans from planters and overseers, who often received warnings from informants, including enslaved people from other ethnic groups (Schuler 1970).

4 Specification and data

The main specification I use to test the relationship between slave revolts and parliamentary support for emancipation is

$$\text{vote}_i = \alpha + \beta \times \text{revolt exposure}_i + \gamma \times \text{MP and constituency controls}_i + u_i,$$

where vote_i is a dummy for whether an MP representing constituency i supported emancipation in parliament. Because the main emancipation bill passed its second reading without a division – that is, without the House formally separating into supporters and opponents – there is no information on how individual MPs positioned themselves on the bill itself.⁵ I follow Gross (1980), Figueroa and Fouka (2023), and Franzmann (1994) and take as a starting point a series of divisions on closely related motions and amendments,

⁴ Section D in the online appendix shows a page from the Times of London where the 1831-32 Baptist War revolt is discussed in detail.

⁵ In British parliamentary procedure, the second reading is the stage at which the House debates the general principle of a bill and decides whether it should proceed to the next stage.

held in June and July 1833, concerning the terms of the emancipation bill. Individual voting information is available for only seven of these divisions, and in each case it takes the form of a minority list identifying the MPs who voted on the losing side. Information on which MPs were absent, abstained, or voted with the majority is not available. A careful reading of these debates shows that, in all seven cases, the minority position was favorable to emancipation. Section G of the online appendix discusses these divisions in detail, including the sources, why the minority lists correspond to a pro-abolition position, and potential sources of measurement error.

Two points are worth noting. First, all seven divisions took place after the last pre-emancipation revolt, so I cannot exploit their time dimension. Second, although the lists are all broadly pro-abolition, not all divisions are equally informative about MPs' support for emancipation. For the main results, I use only the three divisions in which Thomas Fowell Buxton, the leader of the abolitionist group, appears on the minority list: July 24, July 25, and July 31 (vote b). These divisions took place during the committee stage, after the House had agreed to the principle of the bill but before its terms were settled and while the bill itself could still be delayed or defeated. Voting with Buxton in these divisions therefore provides the clearest available evidence of support for the official abolitionist position. Accordingly, I set $vote_i$ equal to 1 if an MP for constituency i voted with Buxton in at least one of these three divisions. I later show that the results are robust to alternative dependent variables constructed from broader sets of divisions: all divisions in which the minority and majority positions map clearly onto pro- and anti-abolition positions, and all slavery-related divisions that took place in July during the committee stage of the bill (Gross 1980).⁶

The main explanatory variable, $revolt\ exposure_i$, measures the extent to which constituency i was exposed to slave revolts in the Caribbean.⁷ The framework in section 2

⁶ The study focuses on the borough constituencies of England and Wales in the parliament that first assembled on 29 January 1833, as for these I have the most complete data. Section O of the online appendix shows that the results are robust to including the county constituencies of England and Wales. This article focuses on the House of Commons; the politics of the House of Lords were very different and are left for future work.

⁷ It is difficult to know which owners experienced direct losses during a revolt, so for

suggests two ways in which to measure this, building up from the exposure of individual slave owners. The first is to simply count the number of owners who were affected:

$$\text{owners affected}_i = \sum_{j \in i} [I(j \text{ owns } \geq 1 \text{ enslaved people in colonies with revolts})] \quad (2)$$

where j is an owner in constituency i , and $I(\cdot)$ is an indicator that equals 1 if the condition in parentheses is true. The second considers the number of slave owners in colonies with slave revolts and also the extent to which each owner's slave portfolio was affected:

$$\text{owners' exposure}_i = \sum_{j \in i} \left[\frac{\sum_c (\text{enslaved}_{j,c} \times \text{revolts}_c)}{\text{enslaved}_j} \right] \quad (3)$$

where $\text{enslaved}_{j,c}$ is the number of enslaved people that individual j owns in colony c , revolts_c is a dummy that equals 1 if colony c had a slave revolt in the sample period, and enslaved_j is the total number of enslaved people owned by j . This measure increases with both the number of affected owners and the extent to which these owners were affected.⁸ The revolts varied in scale (Craton 1982b). The main results focus on major revolts between 1823 and 1832, defined as those with at least 1,000 participants, but the findings are robust to using a broader set of revolts.⁹

I construct these measures using data from the UCL Legacies of British Slavery project (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>). The project digitized the compensation claims submitted by slave owners. These records identify each claimant, their address, the number of enslaved people for whom they claimed compensation, where those enslaved people were located, and the amount of compensation ultimately awarded. I geolocated these addresses and matched them to parliamentary constituencies; see section A.1 in the online appendix for details of the matching.¹⁰ I combine these records with data on slave revolts

most of the analysis I treat revolts as colony-wide shocks.

⁸ Unfortunately, I have no systematic information on these owners' other financial assets.

⁹ I focus on these years because the abolitionist campaign was relaunched in 1823, while 1832 was the last year before the final emancipation vote.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that there were very few cases in which owners sold their claims

from Craton (1982b) to calculate both measures of exposure. In the regressions, I use a log version of this variable, adding 1 before taking logs to accommodate zeros.

The regressions include a number of controls. To account for the possible effect of economic decline, I control for each constituency's exposure to the colonial sugar economy. I construct this as a weighted measure of sugar exports, weighting each colony's exports by the share of that constituency's enslaved people who were held in the colony; this measure is defined in section 5.1.1. I control for differences in local activism by using petitions to the House of Commons. I also control for the number of slave owners. I include a dummy for whether a constituency was created by the Great Reform Act, as these new constituencies were different in ways that could have made them more likely to support emancipation. I use a dummy to control for whether a local MP owned enslaved people, and in some specifications also include a dummy for whether there were any slave owners in the constituency. I include county dummies to deal with geographic heterogeneity. Section A of the online appendix provides further details on the data sources and construction of the variables.

5 Identification and results

To identify the effect of slave revolts on MPs' votes in abolition-related divisions, I need to address the possibility of reverse causality and omitted variables. Reverse causality would be a concern if enslaved people were more or less likely to revolt when their owners lived in English and Welsh constituencies that for other reasons would go on to vote for emancipation in 1833. Omitted-variable bias would arise from shocks or factors that affected both the likelihood of a revolt in a particular colony and support for emancipation in the constituencies where owners exposed to those colonies lived.¹¹ It follows that the causal identification assumption is that slave owners who were highly exposed to slave revolts were not disproportionately located in English and Welsh constituencies that were

to compensation to better-connected individuals (Draper 2010, ch.3).

¹¹ To threaten the causal interpretation of the results, these shocks or factors would have to vary across colonies or constituencies; common shocks or omitted variables that affected all Caribbean colonies or all English and Welsh constituencies are not a concern because they would not generate the cross-sectional differences I document.

otherwise more or less likely to support emancipation. This means that identification could be threatened either by the sorting of slave owners into particular constituencies or by the endogeneity of slave revolts.

I address these challenges in several ways. In the next section I show that English and Welsh constituencies with high and low exposure to slave revolts were on average similar across a number of important factors that could have affected how MPs voted on emancipation. Then, after presenting the main results, section 5.3 shows that exposure to slave revolts helps explain why some constituencies shifted towards supporting emancipation. Section 5.4 shows that the results are robust to focusing exclusively on owners with enslaved people in Jamaica, where I exploit variation in whether these enslaved people were in the areas of Jamaica affected by the Baptist War revolt. This helps address any remaining concerns that colony exposure may determine owner location in Britain. I then turn to the endogeneity of slave revolts. In section 5.5, I consider some possible determinants of revolts, showing that local economic factors and the activities of the abolitionists in Britain appear to have had no effect on slave revolts. Section 5.6 uses an IV strategy where the ethnic fractionalization of the enslaved population is used as an instrument for slave revolts. Section 5.7 shows that selection on unobservables would have to be implausibly large to explain away the results.

5.1 Constituencies and exposure to slave revolts

I next examine whether exposure to slave revolts was systematically related to observable constituency characteristics that might affect support for emancipation. I do this in two steps. First, I compare constituencies with and without slave owners. Second, I consider the large majority of constituencies with slave owners, and compare those with high and low exposure to revolts. The balance tests consider population and the number of voters, which capture the size of the constituency and electorate; petitions sent to the House of Commons, which proxy for local activism; sugar exports and changes in sugar exports, which capture the economic conditions in the colonies to which constituencies were linked through slave ownership; and the number of slave owners.

Table 1 shows these balance checks. It is clear from the left-hand side of the table that the handful of constituencies with no slave owners are fundamentally different from

Table 1: Balance. The first panel compares constituencies with and without slave owners. The second panel restricts the sample to constituencies with slave owners and compares those with low and high exposure to slave revolts.

Variable	no slaves (N=19)		with slaves (N=173)		Diff. in Means		Std. Error	low exposure (N=87)		high exposure (N=86)		Diff. in Means	Std. Error
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.				Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
population _{i,1823}	12739.0	17596.1	21161.0	39725.9	8422.0		5041.6	22204.5	43947.5	20105.3	35172.1	-2099.2	6048.5
population _{i,1832}	14010.4	20581.0	26105.7	47408.0	12095.3*		5940.1	27857.7	52883.6	24333.4	41376.5	-3524.3	7214.8
voters _{i,1832}	613.9	492.2	1538.1	2348.8	924.2***		211.3	1652.8	2711.9	1422.0	1922.3	-230.8	357.1
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.6	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.2		0.1	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.0	0.1
ln petitions _{i,1832}	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.1		0.2	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.1	0.1
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	0.0	0.0	19.9	2.6	19.9***		0.2	19.7	3.5	20.2	1.1	0.5	0.4
ln sugar exports _{i,1832}	0.0	0.0	20.0	2.6	20.0***		0.2	19.8	3.5	20.2	1.1	0.5	0.4
change in sugar exports _{i,1823-1832}	0.0	0.0	1.5	5.0	1.5***		0.4	2.0	6.4	0.9	3.1	-1.1	0.8
slave owners _{i,1833}	0.0	0.0	21.3	63.5	21.3***		4.8	28.6	81.6	13.8	36.4	-14.7	9.6

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Low exposure refers to constituencies with values of the exposure measure in (2) below the median for the sample; high exposure refers to the remaining constituencies. For sugar exports, the value for constituency i is a weighted average of the colony-level values, where the weight for colony c equals the fraction of the enslaved people held by owners in constituency i who were in colony c . Sugar exports for each colony are measured in 1,000s of lbs.

the rest. This suggests controlling for the presence of slave owners and checking whether the results are robust to dropping constituencies with no owners. The right-hand side of the table reveals no systematic differences between constituencies with above-median and below-median exposure to slave revolts.

Next, I consider two key factors that varied across constituencies and over time: the sugar exports of the colonies and the level of local activism in the constituencies. The first captures shocks and systematic differences in the economic conditions of the colonies to which constituencies were linked through slave ownership, at a time when sugar was the Caribbean's main export. This helps control for the economic hypothesis in Williams (1944). The second controls for the level and change in activism across constituencies, and helps capture the role of the abolitionist movement (e.g., Drescher 1977).

5.1.1 Sugar exports

Williams (1944) argued that emancipation was a response to the decline of the Caribbean sugar economies. If constituencies exposed to revolts were also connected to colonies experiencing sharper economic decline, this could confound the relationship between revolt exposure and support for emancipation. As a check, figure 3 compares the annual sugar exports associated with constituencies with high and low exposure to slave revolts. For each constituency i and year t , I construct sugar exports as a weighted average of the



FIGURE 3: Annual sugar exports to Britain associated with different English and Welsh constituencies (in 1,000s of lbs). Low exposure refers to constituencies with values of the exposure measure in (2) below the median for the sample; high exposure refers to the remaining constituencies. The sugar export value for a constituency i in year t is the weighted average of sugar exports for each colony c , where the weight for colony c equals the fraction of the enslaved people held by owners in constituency i who were in colony c . This excludes constituencies with no slave owners. The data are from Mohan and Strobl (2013) and Bensassi, Mohan, and Strobl (2017).

colony-level exports. The weight assigned to exports from colony c is the share of all enslaved people owned by residents of constituency i who were held in that colony.

There are two things worth noting. First, higher exposure is associated with higher sugar exports; this is not surprising because a large number of enslaved people lived in Jamaica, which had slave revolts in the sample period. I therefore control for sugar exports in the regressions, and later examine whether the main results are driven by Jamaica. Second, the trends are parallel before 1830 and diverge only slightly thereafter, with no evidence of a sudden shock to exports. The figure suggests that constituencies with high and low exposure to slave revolts were not connected, through slave ownership, to colonies with systematically different economic trends.¹²

¹² Section 5.5.1 shows that, at the colony level, there was no correlation between sugar exports and slave revolts, or between sugar prices and slave revolts.

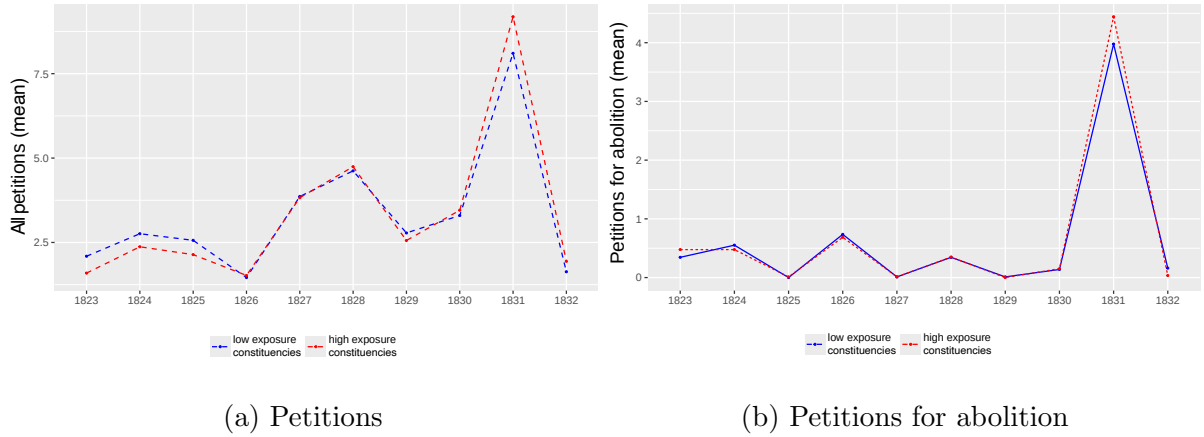


FIGURE 4: Mean annual number of petitions sent by constituencies with high and low exposure to slave revolts. Low exposure refers to constituencies with values of the exposure measure in (2) below the median for the sample; high exposure refers to the remaining constituencies. The sample is restricted to constituencies with slave owners. The petitions data come from the Journals of the House of Commons.

5.1.2 Local activism

Another possibility, following the work that emphasizes the role of the abolitionist movement (Drescher 1977), is that the intensity of local abolitionist activity confounds the relationship. Such activity may have encouraged revolts in colonies linked to the constituency through slave ownership, while also making local MPs more likely to support emancipation. I address this concern by using petitions sent to parliament as a measure of local abolitionist activity. Petitions were widely used to pressure parliament for or against specific legislation, and they were a key element in the abolitionist movement’s repertoire of contention (Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2025; Huzzey 2019).

Figure 4 shows the mean number of petitions sent by high and low exposure constituencies; there is very little difference between the two lines (slave revolts notwithstanding). When focusing exclusively on pro-abolition petitions, the more relevant category for this study, again the two lines are almost on top of each other. This indicates that levels of political activism, including efforts related to abolition, did not differ systematically between the two types of constituencies.¹³

¹³ An additional concern is that owners with holdings in older and newer colonies may have been concentrated in different constituencies. In practice, this does not appear to have been the case (see section J in the online appendix).

Table 2: Number of slave owners, number of enslaved people, and support for emancipation by constituency

Dependent Variable:	Votes _i (binary)			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners _i	0.1613** (0.0563)	0.1626** (0.0561)		
ln enslaved _i			0.0949** (0.0331)	0.0943** (0.0329)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0118 (0.0093)	-0.1902 (0.4704)	-0.0287* (0.0138)	-0.0123 (0.4688)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0013 (0.0707)	-0.0109 (0.0821)	0.0134 (0.0668)	-0.0067 (0.0788)
new constituency _i	0.1585 (0.1152)	0.1571 (0.1185)	0.1953+ (0.1119)	0.1858 (0.1148)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1209 (0.1631)	-0.1189 (0.1656)	-0.0908 (0.1582)	-0.0856 (0.1594)
ln sugar exports _{i,1832}		0.1780 (0.4698)		-0.0164 (0.4693)
ln petitions _{i,1832}		0.0133 (0.0766)		0.0388 (0.0763)
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	192	192
R ²	0.32447	0.32544	0.32800	0.32956
Within R ²	0.06999	0.07132	0.07484	0.07700

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *Votes_i (binary)* equals 1 if an MP in the constituency voted with the abolitionist side in at least one of the abolition-related divisions on July 24, July 25 and the second division on July 31 1833. *ln owners_i* is the log number of slave owners in constituency *i*. *ln enslaved_i* is the log number of enslaved people owned by residents of *i*. *ln sugar exports_{i,1823}* and *ln sugar exports_{i,1832}* are weighted averages of the amount of sugar exported to Britain by different colonies, where the weight for colony *c* equals the fraction of the enslaved people held by owners in constituency *i* who were in colony *c*. *ln petitions_{i,1823}* and *ln petitions_{i,1832}* are the number of petitions sent to the House of Commons by residents of *i* in 1823 and 1832. *new constituency_i* is a dummy that equals 1 if *i* was created in the Great Reform Act. *MP slave owner_i* is a dummy that equals 1 if a local MP was a slave owner. *county* is a full set of county dummies.

5.2 Main results

I first consider the relationship between the number of slave owners in a constituency and how the local MPs voted on emancipation. Columns 1 and 2 of table 2 show that MPs for constituencies with more slave owners were more likely to support emancipation. Columns 3 and 4 show that MPs from constituencies whose residents owned more enslaved people were also more likely to vote for emancipation. This shows that constituencies with stronger ownership ties to slavery were more likely to have MPs who supported emancipation.

Table 3 considers how exposure to slave revolts affected support for emancipation. Columns 1 to 4 measure exposure as the number of owners affected (equation 2). Column 1 includes only the explanatory variable and the county dummies. Column 2, which shows the preferred specification, adds the controls for sugar exports in 1823, petitions in 1823, slave owners, whether the constituency was created in the Great Reform Act and whether the MP owned enslaved people. In column 3, I add controls dated in 1832 and a dummy for the presence of slave owners (to allow for differences in the intensive and extensive margin). Column 4 replicates the specification in column 2 but using only the 173 constituencies that had slave owners. Columns 5 to 8 replicate columns 1-4 but use the exposure measure in (3), which accounts for both the number of owners and the extent of each owner's exposure. Columns 9 and 10 adjust the standard errors for spatial correlation following Conley (1999), using a 10 km bandwidth. Some constituencies were entitled to elect more than one MP, and so columns 11 and 12 show results where the MP is the unit of analysis.¹⁴ Columns 13 and 14 present the results for fixed effects logit regressions for each of the two exposure measures.¹⁵

The table shows that constituencies that were more exposed to slave revolts were more likely to support emancipation. To get a sense of the size of the effect, consider column 2. For each constituency, take the difference between the estimated likelihood that it had an MP who voted for emancipation under actual revolt exposure and the counterfactual likelihood that it would have had an MP who voted for emancipation in the absence of revolts. Aggregating these differences across constituencies implies that exposure to slave revolts increased the predicted number of constituencies with at least one pro-emancipation MP by 58, equivalent to 30 percent of the sample.¹⁶

¹⁴ Here voting for emancipation means that the MP was on the minority list for at least one of the three votes. In the data there were 128 constituencies with 2 MPs: in 59 both MPs were against emancipation, in 48 one was in favor and one was against, and in 21 both were in favor.

¹⁵ The odds ratio for the explanatory variable in column 13 is 2.64 and for the explanatory variable in column 14 it is 2.71. This means that holding all other variables constant, the odds of the outcome occurring are 2.64 and 2.71 times higher for a one-unit increase in the explanatory variable.

¹⁶ The summary statistics for all key variables are in table A1 in the online appendix.

Section K in the online appendix shows that the results are robust to two alternative codings of the dependent variable: one that includes the four divisions that can be clearly classified as pro-abolition (June 10, July 24, July 25 and July 31 (b)) and one that considers only divisions that took place in July, by which point the major provisions of the bill had been agreed. Section O in the online appendix shows that the results are robust to including county constituencies.

Table 3: Slave revolts and emancipation.

Dependent Variable: Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
<i>Variables</i>														
In owners affected _i	0.1058* (0.0505)	0.1860** (0.0692)	0.2189** (0.0717)	0.2243** (0.0738)							0.1328* (0.0516)	0.1378** (0.0511)	0.9723* (0.3980)	0.9973* (0.3976)
In owners' exposure _i					0.1079* (0.0497)	0.1894** (0.0680)	0.2235** (0.0703)	0.2293** (0.0722)	0.1860** (0.0656)	0.1894** (0.0639)				
In sugar exports _{i,1823}		-0.0102 (0.0094)	-0.1051 (0.4877)	-0.0349 (0.0228)		-0.0104 (0.0094)	-0.1103 (0.4871)	-0.0360 (0.0227)	-0.0102 (0.0098)	-0.0104 (0.0098)	-0.0087 (0.0069)	-0.0091 (0.0069)	-0.0517 (0.0432)	-0.0532 (0.0432)
In petitions _{i,1823}		0.0021 (0.0716)	-0.0091 (0.0842)	-0.0018 (0.0749)		0.0018 (0.0713)	-0.0094 (0.0839)	-0.0016 (0.0745)	0.0021 (0.0685)	0.0018 (0.0681)	-0.0469 (0.0492)	-0.0474 (0.0491)	0.0318 (0.3510)	0.0344 (0.3510)
owners _i		-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0014 (0.0009)	-0.0013 (0.0009)		-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0014 (0.0009)	-0.0013 (0.0009)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0012* (0.0005)	-0.0074 (0.0079)	-0.0076 (0.0079)
new constituency _i		0.1743 (0.1146)	0.1772 (0.1158)	0.2062+ (0.1226)		0.1771 (0.1144)	0.1806 (0.1157)	0.2104+ (0.1224)	0.1743 (0.1104)	0.1771 (0.1104)	0.2103* (0.0859)	0.2119* (0.0858)	0.8402 (0.5706)	0.8457 (0.5720)
MP slave owner _i		-0.1085 (0.1590)	-0.0950 (0.1610)	-0.1233 (0.1698)		-0.1099 (0.1582)	-0.0961 (0.1600)	-0.1248 (0.1687)	-0.1085 (0.1634)	-0.1099 (0.1628)	-0.2914*** (0.0822)	-0.2927*** (0.0820)	-0.5586 (0.8012)	-0.5665 (0.8017)
In sugar exports _{i,1832}			0.0673 (0.4894)				0.0714 (0.4885)							
In petitions _{i,1832}			0.0378 (0.0768)				0.0386 (0.0765)							
slave owners in constituency _i			0.5439 (0.4141)				0.5607 (0.4099)							
<i>Dummies</i>														
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>														
Observations	192	192	192	173	192	192	192	173	192	192	320	320	159	159
R ²	0.29741	0.32269	0.33108	0.36118	0.29850	0.32463	0.33351	0.36411	0.32269	0.32463	0.22547	0.22725		
Within R ²	0.03272	0.06754	0.07909	0.09049	0.03423	0.07020	0.08244	0.09466	0.06754	0.07020	0.06502	0.06717		
Sample	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const	MP	MP	Const	Const
Method	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	Logit	Logit

(se: Conley) (se: Conley)

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses, except when otherwise noted. $Votes_i$ (binary) equals 1 if an MP in the constituency voted with the abolitionist side in at least one of the abolition-related divisions on July 24, July 25 and the second division on July 31 1833. $In\ owners\ affected_i$ is the log number of owners in constituency i with enslaved people in colonies that experienced a revolt involving more than 1,000 participants in 1823-32, as in measure (2). $In\ owners' exposure_i$ weighs each owner by the fraction of their enslaved people in colonies that experienced a revolt involving more than 1,000 participants in 1823-32, as in measure (3). $In\ sugar\ exports_{i,1823}$ is the weighted average of the amount of sugar exported to Britain by different colonies, where the weight for colony c equals the fraction of the enslaved people in colony c held by owners in constituency i . $In\ petitions_{i,1823}$ is the number of petitions sent to the House of Commons by residents of i . $owners_i$ is the number of slave owners in constituency i . $MP\ slave\ owner_i$ is a dummy that equals 1 if a local MP was a slave owner. $In\ sugar\ exports_{i,1832}$ is defined analogously to $In\ sugar\ exports_{i,1823}$, and $In\ petitions_{i,1832}$ is defined analogously to $In\ petitions_{i,1823}$. $new\ constituency_i$ is a dummy that equals 1 if i was created by the Great Reform Act of 1832. $slave\ owners\ in\ constituency_i$ is a dummy that equals 1 if there was at least one slave owner in the constituency. $county$ is a full set of county dummies. In columns (9) and (10) the standard errors are adjusted using the correction in Conley (1999), with a distance threshold of 10 km. Columns (13) and (14) are estimated using the command `feglm` in R, and the odds ratios for the explanatory variables are 2.64 and 2.71, respectively. For more details on the variables and sources, see the online appendix.

5.3 Changes in support for emancipation

The abolition-related divisions I use in this paper happened in quick succession in June and July 1833, and there were no slave revolts between them. Most of this paper therefore exploits cross-sectional variation across both British Caribbean colonies and English and Welsh constituencies. Yet it is possible to get a sense for earlier constituency support for emancipation by looking at two earlier divisions. The first, which took place on 1 March 1826, was on a motion that criticized the local authorities in Jamaica for the unfair trial and execution of eight enslaved people. Since this division had no economic implications, it should primarily reflect MPs' views on slavery. The second division, held on 13 July 1830, concerned Henry Brougham's motion to consider measures for ameliorating the living conditions of enslaved people, improving the administration of justice in the colonies, and ultimately abolishing slavery. Of the pre-1833 parliamentary votes for which the minority lists exist, these are the most closely related to slavery.

I use these votes to identify constituencies that moved from having no pro-emancipation MP to having at least one. I record a constituency as having a positive shift if no MP supported the pro-abolition side in the 1826 or 1830 divisions, but at least one MP supported the pro-abolition side in one of the 1833 divisions. I record a negative switch if at least one MP supported the pro-abolition side in either the 1826 or the 1830 division, but no MP supported the pro-abolition side in any of the 1833 divisions. Since both of the early divisions predate the Great Reform Act of 1832, while all the later ones happened in 1833, the analysis only includes constituencies that existed both before and after the Act.¹⁷

Columns 1 and 2 in table 4 show that slave revolts had a positive and statistically significant effect on switches in favor of emancipation (where the alternative combines no switches and switches against emancipation). Column 3 considers as treated only those constituencies exposed to Jamaica; this is to deal with the fact that the other very large slave revolt, in Guiana in 1823, predates all the divisions. The coefficient is only slightly smaller. Columns 4 to 6 replicate the estimation using switches toward opposing

¹⁷ Consequently, there is selection into this sample of constituencies; see Aidt and Leon-Ablan (2025) for a detailed discussion of the reform. The reform also changed the boundaries of existing constituencies, but the matching method I use is robust to this.

Table 4: Changes in support for emancipation (by constituency)

Dependent Variables: Model:	switched to support emancipation _i			switched to oppose emancipation _i		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
ln owners affected _i	0.2038* (0.0954)			-0.0130 (0.0671)		
ln owners' exposure _i		0.2132* (0.0941)			-0.0157 (0.0678)	
ln owners (Jamaica) _i			0.1904* (0.0901)			-0.0592 (0.0709)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0383+ (0.0220)	-0.0394+ (0.0220)	-0.0384+ (0.0214)	0.0031 (0.0128)	0.0034 (0.0129)	0.0092 (0.0128)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0826 (0.0791)	-0.0825 (0.0790)	-0.0688 (0.0781)	0.1222* (0.0509)	0.1223* (0.0509)	0.1193* (0.0502)
owners _i	2.03 × 10 ⁻⁵ (0.0019)	-0.0001 (0.0019)	0.0003 (0.0019)	-0.0037+ (0.0019)	-0.0037+ (0.0019)	-0.0029 (0.0019)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1774 (0.1893)	-0.1784 (0.1885)	-0.1688 (0.1887)	0.0288 (0.1072)	0.0293 (0.1073)	0.0372 (0.1056)
slave owners in constituency _i	0.5076 (0.4138)	0.5214 (0.4140)	0.5346 (0.4034)	-0.0555 (0.2515)	-0.0594 (0.2511)	-0.1347 (0.2434)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	152	152	152	152	152	152
R ²	0.39247	0.39541	0.39213	0.46049	0.46059	0.46505
Within R ²	0.08173	0.08618	0.08122	0.08120	0.08137	0.08896
Sample	all owners	all owners	all owners	all owners	all owners	all owners

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *switched to support emancipation_i* is a dummy that equals 1 if no MP representing constituency *i* supported either the 1826 Jamaican slave trials vote or Brougham's 1830 motion, but at least one MP representing *i* supported one of the following three 1833 abolition-related divisions: July 24, July 25 or the second division on July 31. *switched to oppose emancipation_i* is a dummy that equals 1 if at least one MP representing *i* supported either the 1826 Jamaican slave trials vote or Brougham's 1830 motion, but no MP representing *i* supported any of these three 1833 votes. *ln owners (Jamaica)_i* is defined as the number of residents in the constituency who owned enslaved people in Jamaica. All other variables are as defined in the notes to table 3.

emancipation as the dependent variable (where the alternative combines no switches and switches in favor of emancipation), showing that slave revolts did not turn constituencies against emancipation. These findings are consistent with my account that slave revolts helped build support for emancipation.

5.4 Variation within Jamaica

To further address the concern that cross-colony differences unrelated to revolts may affect how MPs voted, I restrict the analysis to owners with enslaved people in Jamaica. Jamaica was Britain's most important Caribbean colony, had by far the largest enslaved

population, and was the site of the Baptist War of 1831-32, the last major slave revolt before emancipation. By focusing on Jamaica, I hold constant shocks and other factors that operated at the colony level.

The Baptist War began on the Kensington estate, in the hills above Montego Bay, and spread through northwestern Jamaica. The revolt's location partly reflected the fact that its leader, Samuel Sharpe, was enslaved in the area. Jamaica's size and terrain meant that information traveled slowly, and so the revolt was repressed before it could spread across the island. Figure 5 shows the four affected parishes of St James, Trelawny, Hanover and Westmoreland in a dark shade. Figure 6 shows the distribution of enslaved people across Jamaican parishes.

Table 5 shows the results with the sample limited to owners with enslaved people in Jamaica. Owners are classified as exposed if they held enslaved people in one of the four affected parishes. Owners whose enslaved people were held only in unaffected Jamaican parishes form the control group. The results are similar to the baseline estimates: exposure to the Baptist War had a positive and statistically significant effect on the likelihood that a constituency would vote for emancipation.¹⁸

5.5 Determinants of slave revolts

This section examines whether slave revolts were themselves driven by two factors often used to explain emancipation: colonial economic conditions (Williams 1944) and abolitionist activity in Britain (Drescher 1977). The evidence suggests that they were not.

5.5.1 Economic conditions in the colonies

Slave owners resident in Britain had limited access to information about the Caribbean (see section C). They were nevertheless well informed about developments that directly

¹⁸ The parishes affected by the Baptist War were also among Jamaica's largest slave-holding parishes. Table A5 in the online appendix restricts the sample of owners to those who had enslaved people in Jamaica's ten largest parishes. Owners are classified as affected if they held enslaved people in St James, Trelawny, Hanover, or Westmoreland. The results are very similar to those in table 5.

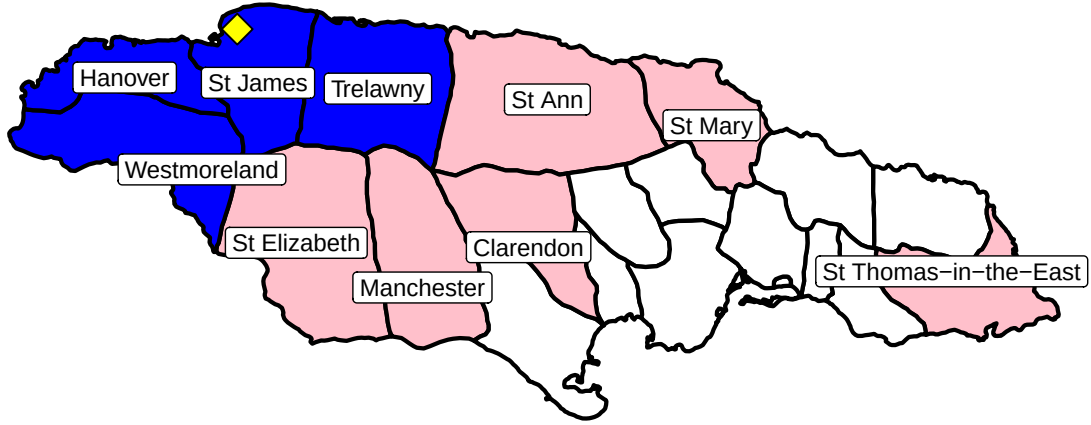


FIGURE 5: Jamaican parishes in 1832. Dark blue indicates parishes affected by the Baptist War slave revolt. Light pink indicates parishes with large enslaved populations that were not affected by the revolt. Together, the blue and pink areas identify the ten Jamaican parishes with the largest enslaved populations. The yellow triangle marks the location of the Kensington plantation, near Montego Bay, where the Baptist War began.

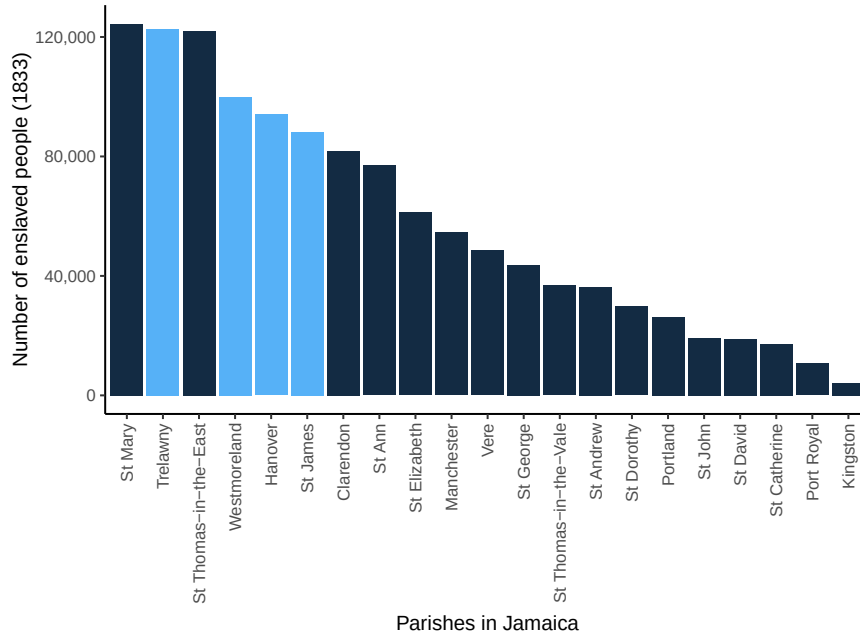


FIGURE 6: Number of enslaved people by Jamaican parish, 1833

affected their investments, including colonial unrest, sugar prices, sugar exports, and major shocks such as hurricanes. To check whether these economic factors affected slave revolts, table 6 reports the results of regressions where the outcome is a binary variable that equals 1 if there was a large slave revolt in colony i in year t , where a large slave revolt is one with more than 1,000 participants. The independent variables are annual average sugar prices, measured using the London market price of muscovado sugar; annual sugar exports by colony, measured in thousands of pounds; and an index that captures the

Table 5: Regressions where the sample of owners is restricted to those who held enslaved people in Jamaica. Slave owners with enslaved people in the parishes affected by the Baptist War revolt (Hanover, St James, Trelawny, or Westmoreland) are considered to be affected and exposed. Slave owners with enslaved people in Jamaica but not in the affected parishes are considered unaffected and unexposed. Slave owners with no enslaved people in Jamaica are not included.

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
$\ln \text{ owners affected}_i$ (Jamaica parishes)	0.1867* (0.0729)	
$\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_i$ (Jamaica parishes)		0.1895* (0.0752)
$\ln \text{ sugar exports}_{i,1823}$	-0.0024 (0.0071)	-0.0020 (0.0070)
$\ln \text{ petitions}_{i,1823}$	0.0270 (0.0675)	0.0277 (0.0682)
owners_i (Jamaica)	-0.0026 (0.0019)	-0.0025 (0.0019)
$\text{new constituency}_i$	0.1631 (0.1187)	0.1568 (0.1196)
MP slave owner_i	-0.1026 (0.1669)	-0.1118 (0.1677)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
R ²	0.32013	0.31837
Within R ²	0.06401	0.06159

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. $\ln \text{ owners affected}_i$ (Jamaica parishes) is the log number of owners in constituency i with enslaved people in the Jamaican parishes affected by the Baptist War revolt of 1831-32 (Hanover, St James, Trelawny, Westmoreland). $\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_i$ (Jamaica parishes) is the exposure equivalent to the affected-owners measure. owners_i (Jamaica) is the number of owners in constituency i with enslaved people in Jamaica. All other variables are as defined in table 3.

annual incidence of hurricanes by colony. Columns 1 through 3 show that lags of sugar exports, sugar prices and hurricanes are not correlated with the incidence of revolts. Columns 4 to 6 look at the value of sugar exports and find no relationship between this measure and slave revolts. One concern is that the coefficients may capture the effect of revolts on sugar prices. Column 7 therefore drops the year after each revolt. Lagged sugar exports then become statistically significant, with higher exports associated with a lower probability of a revolt. I address this concern below using an instrumental variable strategy that exploits exogenous variation in the incidence of slave revolts.

Table 6: The effect of economic factors and shocks on slave revolts (1815-1833)

Dependent Variable: Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	Revolts _{c,t} (binary)			
				(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Variables</i>							
ln sugar exports _{c,t-1} (quantity)	-0.0347 (0.0269)	-0.0310 (0.0324)	-0.0228 (0.0158)				-0.1176* (0.0450)
sugar price _{t-1} (annual)	-0.0008 (0.0023)	-0.0008 (0.0024)					-0.0017 (0.0030)
ln sugar exports _{c,t-1} (value)				-0.0415 (0.0401)	-0.0394 (0.0432)	-0.0250 (0.0183)	
hurricane index _{c,t-1} (annual)		0.0398 (0.1048)			0.0388 (0.1025)		0.0675 (0.1385)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>							
colony	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
year			Yes			Yes	
<i>Fit statistics</i>							
Observations	157	157	165	157	157	157	126
R ²	0.05760	0.06308	0.22549	0.06033	0.06558	0.22706	0.08996
Within R ²	0.00573	0.01151	0.00241	0.00862	0.01415	0.00267	0.02897
Sample							excludes year after revolt

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Standard errors are clustered at the colony level. The unit of analysis is the (*colony, year*); there are 14 colonies in this sample and a number of observations are missing. *Revolts_{c,t} (binary)* is a dummy that equals 1 if there was a slave revolt in colony c in year t . *ln sugar exports_{c,t-1} (quantity)* is the amount of sugar in 1,000s of lbs exported from colony c to Britain in year $t - 1$. *sugar price_{t-1} (annual)* is the average annual price of muscovado sugar in London, *ln sugar exports_{c,t-1} (value)* is calculated by multiplying the quantity of sugar exported and the price of sugar, and *hurricanes_{c,t-1} (annual)* is an index that measures the annual impact of hurricanes on colony c in year $t - 1$. These data are from Mohan and Strobl (2013) and Bensassi, Mohan, and Strobl (2017). See section A of the online appendix for more details.

5.5.2 Abolitionist activity in Britain

Historians have argued that the abolitionist campaign helped encourage enslaved people to resist slavery (e.g., Scanlan 2020). This influence would have been indirect; direct coordination was unlikely, given abolitionists' fear of slave revolts and the limited communication channels between Britain and the Caribbean. I therefore examine whether the incidence of revolts correlates with (i) the number of debates on abolition in the British parliament, and (ii) mentions of abolition in colonial newspapers.

Figure 7 shows the number of parliamentary debates on abolition, with vertical lines indicating revolts with more than 1,000 participants. The two largest slave revolts, in British Guiana in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831-32, are shown in red. In neither case was the revolt preceded by a large spike in parliamentary debates. Rather, debates increased after the revolts. The smaller revolts in blue do seem to come after periods of increased

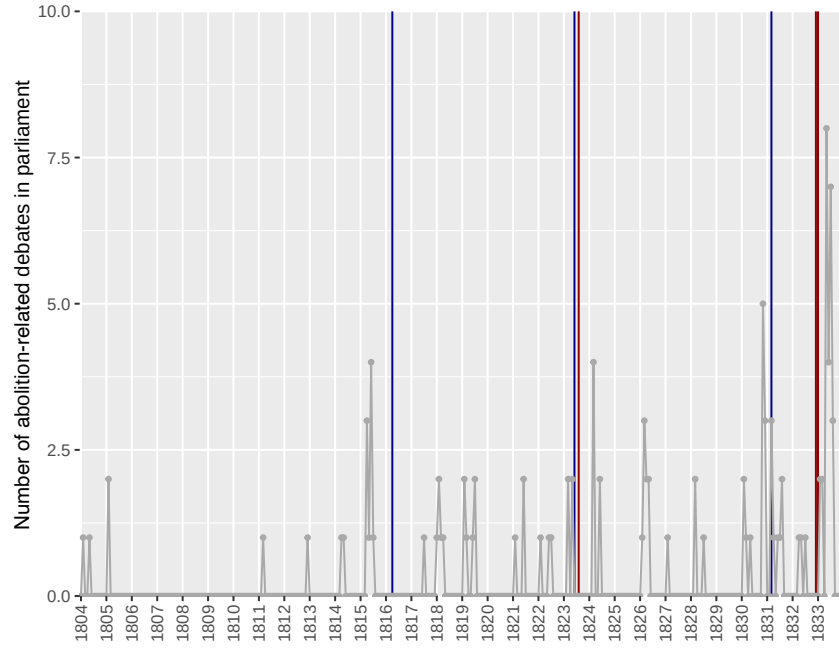


FIGURE 7: Number of parliamentary debates on abolition, by month. Computed using the data in Eggers and Spirling (2014). The red lines correspond to the two largest slave revolts, in Guiana (August 1823) and Jamaica (December 1831 and January 1832). The blue lines correspond to three other large slave revolts: Barbados (14–16 April 1816), Jamaica (which started in Summer 1823) and Antigua (March 1831).

parliamentary activity on abolition. To examine this further, table 7 shows the results from simple regressions that correlate the number of parliamentary debates on abolition with the incidence of a revolt in the British Caribbean. Revolts are relatively rare events, but this quick check shows no systematic relationship between the two.

If revolts were a response to abolitionist activity in Britain, enslaved people in the Caribbean would have needed to know about that activity. Colonial newspapers were one possible source of such information. I check for this by recording all mentions of “abolition” in the context of “slavery” in colonial newspapers in the British Newspaper Archive collection. Although the archive’s colonial coverage is incomplete, it includes enough issues from one Jamaican and two Barbadian newspapers to evaluate the frequency of their reporting on abolition. Figure 8 reveals no clear pattern in the frequency of these reports.

Table 7: Parliamentary debates on slavery and slave revolts (monthly data)

Dependent Variable:	revolts _t			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
debate total _t	0.0043 (0.0076)			
debate total _{t-1}		0.0008 (0.0076)		
debate total _{t-2}			-0.0062 (0.0076)	
debate total _{t-3}				0.0112 (0.0076)
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	360	359	358	357
R ²	0.00089	0.00003	0.00185	0.00609
Adjusted R ²	-0.00190	-0.00277	-0.00095	0.00329

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. *revolts_t* is the total number of large slave revolts in the British Caribbean in month *t*. Large revolts are those Craton (1982b) describes as having thousands or many thousands of participants. Standard errors are iid. *debate total_t* is the total number of debates on issues related to abolition that took place in period *t*, where *t* refers to a (*month, year*). This is calculated using the data in Eggers and Spirling (2014). The lags are intended to account for the delay in the diffusion of information from Britain to the Caribbean.

5.6 IV: fractionalization

To further address the endogeneity concerns, I instrument for the number of slave revolts in a colony using the ethnic fractionalization of its enslaved population. The logic is that ethnic fractionalization made coordination among enslaved people more difficult. Scholars have shown that slave revolts typically drew participants from a single ethnic group, partly because group-specific religious practices often played an important role in organizing them (e.g., Schuler 1970). In some cases, enslaved people from other ethnic groups informed plantation owners and overseers of these plots in exchange for rewards (Schuler 1970). Colonies with higher ethnic fractionalization should therefore have experienced fewer slave revolts. Consistent with this logic, figure A8 in the online appendix shows a negative correlation between fractionalization and revolts at the colony level.

The exclusion restriction is that ethnic fractionalization in different colonies affected how English and Welsh constituencies voted for emancipation only through its effect on slave revolts. Three points support this assumption. First, fractionalization was not shaped by the actions of enslaved people, nor was it deliberately engineered by planters or colonial authorities. Second, slave revolts are unlikely to have altered fractionalization, so the instrument was not itself affected by the endogenous variable. These points matter

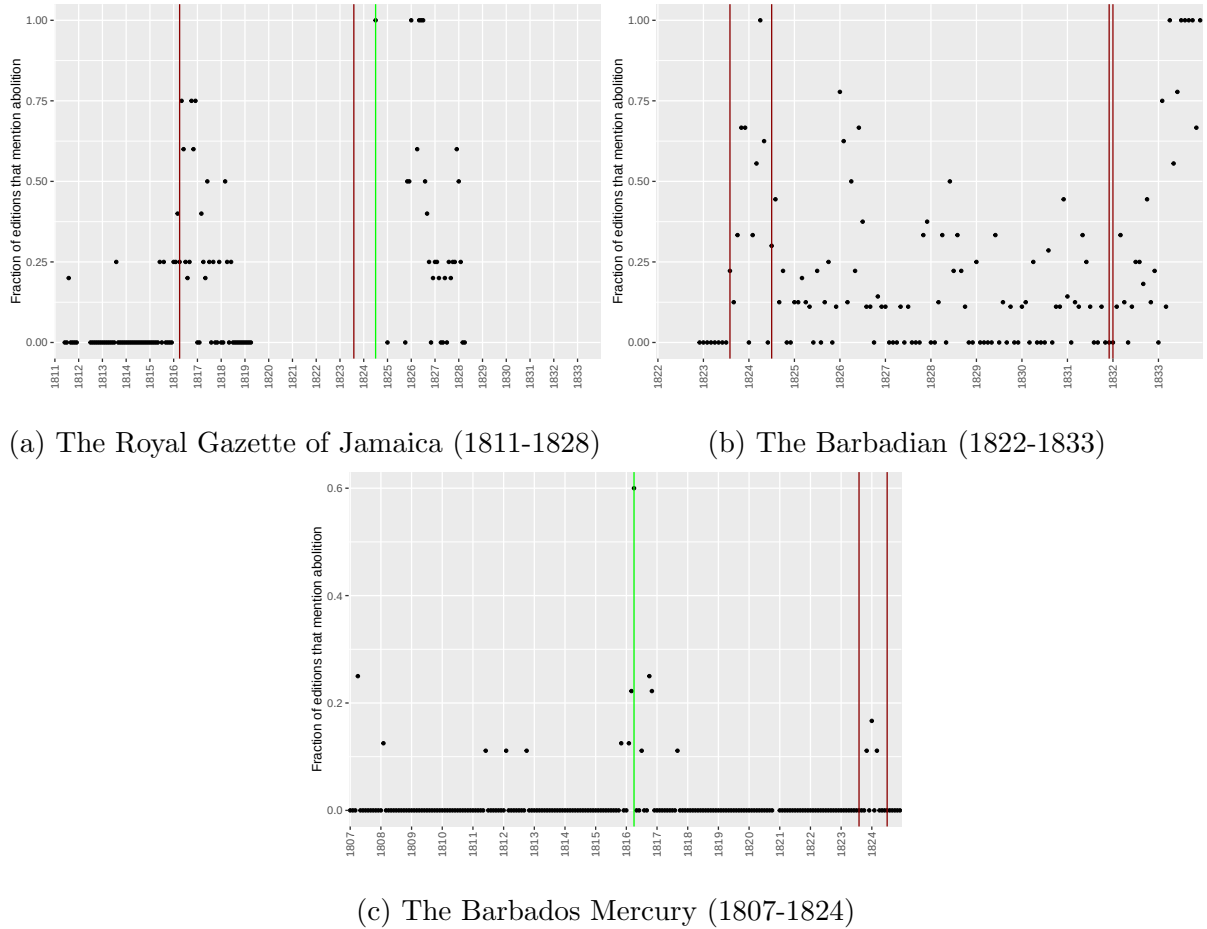


FIGURE 8: Newspaper mentions of the abolition of slavery. I use the three colonial newspapers for which there are a sufficient number of volumes available: the Royal Gazette of Jamaica, the Barbadian and the Barbados Mercury. For each month, I compute the fraction of editions that have articles that mention “abolition” in the context of “slavery”. Green lines mark the date of slave revolts in the colony where the newspaper was published; red lines mark the dates of slave revolts in other colonies.

because otherwise it would be difficult to argue that fractionalization affected parliamentary behavior only through slave revolts. Third, the most plausible alternative channels involve non-revolt collective action by enslaved people, but these are unlikely to explain parliamentary voting in England and Wales. I discuss each point in turn.

Several features of the transatlantic slave trade make it unlikely that fractionalization was shaped by the actions of enslaved people or deliberately engineered by planters or colonial authorities. There was no ethnic sorting across colonies and very little overt cross-group violence. Although mortality rates may have differed across ethnic groups, there were no large differences in mortality across colonies (see section L of the online appendix). Nor is there evidence that planters deliberately engineered the ethnic composition of enslaved populations to make them more fractionalized. Such a strategy would have

required extensive coordination in a slave market that was decentralized and competitive. As Craton (1982b, p.25) explains, “slaves were commonly labeled according to their African port of embarkation rather than by true ethnic origin” and West Indian planters “took the slaves they could find and afford, and the stereotypes they invented tell us more about the whites themselves and the needs of the plantation than about Africans and their availability”.¹⁹ There is also no evidence that particular ethnic groups were deliberately sent to specific locations: “destination in the Americas does not appear to have been a significant factor affecting the make-up of ship consignments of slaves” (Lovejoy 1994). Finally, the slave trade data show substantial mixing; for example, ships from Biafra went to all of the colonies in the sample.

Slave revolts are also unlikely to have altered fractionalization. Although revolts were brutally repressed, casualties among enslaved people were typically counted in the dozens, too few to meaningfully change ethnic composition at the colony level. Colonial authorities also had an incentive to limit deaths among enslaved people, who were valuable financial assets. When participants were executed, the standard practice was to select only one or two from each plantation, with owners compensated for the loss.

Because the instrument captures variation in the ability of enslaved people to coordinate, the main remaining concern is that fractionalization may have affected how English and Welsh constituencies voted on emancipation through forms of collective action other than slave revolts. This is unlikely. Enslaved people were excluded from the formal channels through which political pressure was exerted in Britain: they could not vote, petition parliament, legally protest, or meaningfully access the legal system. Informal and extralegal resistance certainly existed, but it was unlikely to affect parliamentary voting in England and Wales unless it became large and coordinated enough to be visible to owners. In that case, it would be recorded as a revolt in the data. Nor is it likely that fractionalization affected votes through plantation output. Although fractionalization is often associated with lower trust and less effective teamwork, enslaved people in the Caribbean had little control over the work they performed, its pace, or whom they worked alongside. Plantation production was organized coercively by slave owners rather than through voluntary cooperation among workers. Fractionalization is therefore unlikely to

¹⁹ Online appendix L has a more detailed discussion of the exclusion restriction.

have meaningfully affected output, other than through its effect on slave revolts.

To construct the instrument, I draw on data from the SlaveVoyages.org project, which records the number of enslaved people transported to the Americas from various African ports.²⁰ I consider all enslaved people transported to the British Caribbean between 1650 and 1807, the latter being the year in which Britain abolished the slave trade. I assume that each of these individuals had one living descendant at every point in time, and that this descendant was of the same ethnicity, where ethnicity refers to the point of embarkation. Thus, if an individual arrived in Jamaica in 1700 from port A, I assume that in 1815 there was one unique descendant in Jamaica and that this person was of ethnicity A. For each colony c , I calculate an index of fractionalization:

$$fract_c = 1 - \sum_k (\text{fraction of enslaved in } c \text{ from origin } k)^2$$

where k indexes over points of embarkation in Africa. The value of the IV for constituency i is therefore the average across owners j in constituency i of the weighted fractionalization value for each owner:

$$IV_i = \frac{\sum_{j \in i} \left[\frac{\sum_c (fract_c \times enslaved_{j,c})}{\sum_c enslaved_{j,c}} \right]}{\sum_{j \in i} 1} \quad (4)$$

where $enslaved_{j,c}$ is the number of enslaved people owned by individual j in colony c ; the instrument is set to 0 when there are no owners in i . Thus, for individual j , the weight given to $fract_c$ is equal to the fraction of enslaved individuals owned by j who are in colony c . One interpretation of this index is that it captures the relative security of each constituency's slave portfolio. Because the relationship between fractionalization and revolts may also depend on the size of the enslaved population in each colony, I control for this directly.

The results are reported in table 8. The first stage shows a strong and negative relationship between fractionalization and slave revolts. Consistent with the reasoning outlined above, the more fractionalized the enslaved population, the fewer the number of revolts.²¹ The second stage coefficients are similar to those in table 3, confirming

²⁰ See figure A3 in the online appendix for the points of embarkation.

²¹ Section L of the online appendix shows the reduced-form results.

Table 8: IV

First stage	ln owners affected _i (1)	ln owners' exposure _i (2)
<i>Variables</i>		
fractionalization _i (IV)	-7.878*** (0.694)	-7.926*** (0.7088)
ln enslaved in colonies _i	0.486*** (0.0399)	0.4895*** (0.0407)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0025 (0.0102)	-0.0031 (0.0107)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.1200* (0.0540)	0.1162* (0.0540)
owners _i	0.0036* (0.0014)	0.0035* (0.0014)
new constituency _i	-0.0418 (0.0964)	-0.0536 (0.0966)
MP slave owner _i	0.2235* (0.1111)	0.2254* (0.1112)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
Adjusted R ²	0.9125	0.9090
Instrument F-stat	232.87	230.53
Second stage	Votes _i (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i	0.1561+ (0.0912)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1516+ (0.0905)
ln enslaved in colonies _i	0.0449 (0.0351)	0.0448 (0.0351)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0395+ (0.0236)	-0.0395+ (0.0236)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0135 (0.0727)	0.0142 (0.0724)
owners _i	-0.0011 (0.0010)	-0.0011 (0.0010)
new constituency _i	0.1842 (0.1139)	0.1860 (0.1138)
MP slave owner _i	-0.0997 (0.1592)	-0.0998 (0.1587)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
Adjusted R ²	0.0362	0.0362

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. The fractionalization IV is defined by equation (4). *ln enslaved in colonies_i* is the log number of enslaved people held by residents of constituency *i*. The rest of the variables are defined in the notes to table 3.

the paper’s main findings. The standard errors are larger, as expected with 2SLS, and this makes the coefficients only marginally significant. It is important to note that the coefficient on the exposure measures should be interpreted as an average causal response: the average (marginal) effect on MPs’ votes in constituencies where residents owned enslaved people in colonies where fractionalization affected revolts.²² In other words, the IV only uses variation from that subset of constituencies.

5.7 Sensitivity to unobserved selection

To assess how sensitive the main results in table 3 are to omitted-variable bias, I implement the proportional-selection approach developed by Oster (2019). The method compares a baseline specification, which includes one of the exposure measures and county fixed effects, with a fully controlled specification that adds the full set of observed controls. It uses both the movement in the coefficient of interest and the associated change in R^2 to infer how strong selection on unobservables would need to be, relative to selection on observables, to explain away the estimated effect. The method requires an assumption about $R_{\max}$, the hypothetical R^2 that would be obtained if both observed and unobserved determinants of the outcome were included in the regression. Following Oster (2019), I set $R_{\max} = 1.3R_{\text{cont}}^2$ and cap it at one, where R_{cont}^2 is from the specification with the observed controls.

The results are reported in table 9. Adding controls increases rather than attenuates the coefficient of interest: it rises from 0.106 to 0.186 when using $\ln \text{owners affected}_i$ as the measure of exposure, and from 0.108 to 0.189 when using $\ln \text{owners' exposure}_i$. The implied values of δ are approximately -3.99 and -3.97 . In other words, explaining away the estimates would require selection on unobservables to be about four times as strong as selection on observables, and to operate in the opposite direction. This suggests that unobserved factors do not account for the findings in table 3.

²² This requires a monotonicity assumption: increases in constituency-level exposure to fractionalization always have a non-positive effect on exposure to revolts.

Table 9: Sensitivity to Unobserved Selection

Treatment	Coef. estimates		Selection ratio
	Baseline coef.	Controlled coef.	δ for coef. = 0
$\ln \text{ owners affected}_i$	0.106	0.186	-3.99
$\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_i$	0.108	0.189	-3.97

Notes: The baseline model includes the exposure measure and county fixed effects. The controlled model adds the following variables: $\ln \text{ sugar exports}_{i,1823}$, $\ln \text{ petitions}_{i,1823}$, owners_i , $\text{new constituency}_i$ and MP slave owner_i . I set $R_{\max} = 1.3R_{\text{cont}}^2$ and cap it at one, as recommended by Oster (2019). Negative values of δ indicate that explaining away the estimates would require unobserved selection to offset, rather than mirror, the selection pattern captured by the observed controls.

5.8 Heterogeneity and spillovers

There are two further related concerns. First, the results may be driven by Jamaica, a colony that differed considerably from the rest: it had the largest enslaved population, the largest number of absentee owners, and experienced major slave revolts. Second, revolts in one colony may have generated spillover effects elsewhere in the Caribbean.

To address these issues, I define five new variables: *owners (Jamaica)*, *owners (Guiana)*, *owners (Barbados)*, *owners (Antigua)* and *owners (St Vincent)*. I choose these five colonies because they had the largest number of enslaved people (see figure A5 in the online appendix). I then estimate the main specification using these variables one at a time, and find that the results are driven by Jamaica and Guiana, the colonies that experienced the largest slave revolts. Consider the regression that uses *owners (Jamaica)*: this captures how the presence of owners with enslaved people in Jamaica affected how MPs voted on emancipation, regardless of whether these owners or others held enslaved people in other colonies. Since Jamaica had a very large slave revolt in this period, this variable's coefficient should be positive and significant; column 1 in table 10 shows that it is. Turning to *owners (Guiana)*, this regression looks at the effect on the vote of having owners with enslaved people in Guiana. Since Guiana had the other very large slave revolt in this period, again this variable's coefficient should be positive and significant; column 2 in table 10 shows that it is. For *owners (Barbados)*, this regression considers owners with enslaved people in Barbados, and the coefficient should be either negative or zero; column 3 in table 10 shows that it is zero. The coefficients on the explanatory variables for the regressions that look at Antigua and St Vincent are indistinguishable from zero too (see columns 4 and 5 in table 10).

Table 10: Slave revolts by colony and support for emancipation by constituency

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Variables</i>					
ln owners _i (Jamaica)	0.1906** (0.0671)				
ln owners _i (Guiana)		0.1989* (0.0769)			
ln owners _i (Barbados)			0.0765 (0.0737)		
ln owners _i (Antigua)				0.0898 (0.0845)	
ln owners _i (St Vincent)					0.1787 (0.1110)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0078 (0.0701)	0.0091 (0.0703)	0.0347 (0.0696)	0.0372 (0.0688)	0.0170 (0.0711)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0100 (0.0092)	-0.0002 (0.0083)	3.78×10^{-5} (0.0083)	0.0008 (0.0082)	0.0005 (0.0083)
owners _i	-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0003 (0.0010)	-0.0004 (0.0011)	-0.0009 (0.0010)
new constituency _i	0.1720 (0.1145)	0.1752 (0.1166)	0.1526 (0.1229)	0.1411 (0.1224)	0.1451 (0.1232)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1019 (0.1584)	-0.0843 (0.1731)	-0.0789 (0.1763)	-0.0766 (0.1642)	-0.1160 (0.1713)
<i>Dummies</i>					
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>					
Observations	192	192	192	192	192
R ²	0.32577	0.31238	0.29259	0.29250	0.30058
Within R ²	0.07178	0.05334	0.02610	0.02597	0.03710
Sample	all owners	all owners	all owners	all owners	all owners

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *ln owners_i (Jamaica)* is the number of owners with enslaved people in Jamaica; analogous definitions apply to the variables for Guiana, Barbados, Antigua and St Vincent. All other variables are as defined in the notes to table 3.

These findings show two things. First, the main results in table 3 are not simply picking up a Jamaica effect. Second, since exposure to colonies without revolts does not appear to influence voting behavior, there is no evidence of spillover effects from colonies that experienced very large revolts; and in any case, spillovers would bias the coefficients against the main result. The absence of spillovers is not entirely surprising given the context. Enslaved people had limited access to information about events elsewhere in the Caribbean or in Britain, and conditions varied enough across the region that a revolt in one colony did not necessarily imply that one would occur elsewhere. If revolt risk was perceived as largely colony-specific, then the effect of revolts on asset prices should also have been somewhat localized.

5.9 The size of slave revolts

The main results are estimated using a measure of exposure that only considers slave revolts with more than a thousand participants. I recalculate the exposure measures using three alternative subsets of revolts. Columns 1 and 2 of table 11 count only exposure to the two largest revolts, those with many thousands of participants in Guiana in 1823 and in Jamaica in 1831-32. Columns 3 and 4 include all revolts except these two very large uprisings, while columns 5 and 6 use the full set of revolts, including minor uprisings with only dozens of participants. The results are similar across all three definitions.

Table 11: Alternative thresholds for revolt size

Dependent Variable: Sample:	Only very large revolts		Votes _i (binary) Excludes very large revolts		All revolts	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
ln owners affected _i	0.2004** (0.0647)		0.1635* (0.0701)		0.1776* (0.0692)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1985** (0.0645)		0.1659* (0.0693)		0.1806** (0.0681)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0110 (0.0093)	-0.0108 (0.0093)	-0.0085 (0.0093)	-0.0086 (0.0093)	-0.0097 (0.0094)	-0.0099 (0.0094)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0019 (0.0709)	-0.0007 (0.0707)	0.0136 (0.0707)	0.0135 (0.0705)	0.0044 (0.0715)	0.0043 (0.0712)
owners _i	-0.0013 (0.0008)	-0.0013 (0.0008)	-0.0010 (0.0009)	-0.0010 (0.0009)	-0.0011 (0.0009)	-0.0011 (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1845 (0.1137)	0.1858 (0.1138)	0.1659 (0.1164)	0.1681 (0.1162)	0.1754 (0.1153)	0.1782 (0.1152)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1087 (0.1596)	-0.1060 (0.1596)	-0.1063 (0.1614)	-0.1084 (0.1611)	-0.1111 (0.1613)	-0.1127 (0.1607)
<i>Dummies</i>						
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	192	192	192	192	192	192
R ²	0.32938	0.32844	0.31599	0.31719	0.31987	0.32152
Within R ²	0.07674	0.07545	0.05831	0.05997	0.06366	0.06593

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. In columns 1-2, *ln owners affected_i* and *ln owners' exposure_i* are calculated using only very large revolts: those involving many thousands of participants in Guiana in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831-32. In columns 3-4, these variables are calculated using all revolts except the very large revolts in Guiana in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831-32. In columns 5-6, they are calculated using all slave revolts recorded by Craton (1982b): those involving dozens, hundreds, thousands, or many thousands of participants. All other variables are defined in the notes to Table 3.

5.10 Other robustness checks

I conduct a number of other robustness tests; these are reported in section O of the online appendix. Table A7 includes controls for the size of the constituency, both in terms of the number of residents and in the number of enslaved people owned by local slave owners. The results are robust to the inclusion of these controls. Table A8 shows that the results are robust to including the county constituencies of England and Wales. One concern may be that the results are driven by London, which was home to many colonial agents and merchants. Table A9 shows that the results are somewhat robust to dropping London from the sample, though it is clear that London plays an important role in driving the overall findings. A related concern is that the results are capturing the effect of the large English slave-trading ports of Bristol and Liverpool, but table A9 shows that dropping these two cities does not overturn the main findings. One possibility is that owners with larger holdings of enslaved people behaved differently from those with smaller holdings. Tables A10 and A11 in the online appendix show that the results are robust to keeping only owners who filed large compensation claims (i.e. restricting attention to large slave owners) and keeping only those who filed small claims (i.e. restricting attention to small slave owners). Table A12 shows that the results are also robust to keeping only owners whose compensation claims were successful.²³

6 The economic mechanism: Slave revolts and asset prices

To show that slave revolts lowered asset prices in the affected colonies (link 1 in (1)), I use data from Jamaica and Barbados. Jamaica was the wealthiest British colony in the Caribbean and had the largest number of enslaved people, while Barbados was the first Caribbean island fully colonized by England. I collected these data from a combination of printed and hand-written documents held at the National Archives in London.

²³ The motivation for using all claims, successful and unsuccessful, is that owners may not have known *ex-ante* that their claims would be rejected, and so would have supported emancipation with the expectation of receiving compensation.

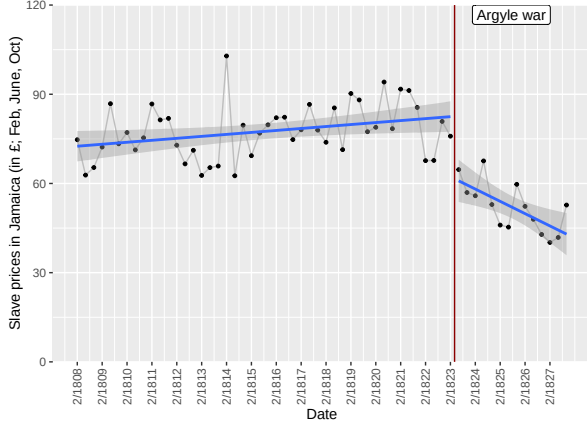
Figure 9a shows slave prices in Jamaica.²⁴ The series stops before the Baptist War revolt, but it includes the time around the Argyle War, a period of unrest that started in the summer of 1823, probably in August.²⁵ The figure shows that slave prices in Jamaica dropped suddenly and continued to fall after the Argyle War, consistent with asset values going down after a revolt. The price of an enslaved individual was 42 percent lower in October 1824 than it had been in February 1821. For comparison, figure 9b shows slave prices in Barbados, where the vertical line highlights the start of the Argyle War. There is no sudden drop in prices and the trend continues largely unchanged. This is consistent with asset values being geographically localized, even before the intercolonial trade in enslaved people was banned in 1825.

This fall in asset values is plausibly a result of the effect that slave revolts had on the Jamaican economy. Figures 10a, 10b and 10c show a fall in exports after the Argyle War and a change in trends following the Baptist War. Turning to military spending, figure 11a shows a sharp rise in spending during the Baptist War. This increase appears to have been temporary, although the decline that followed may partly reflect the effects of emancipation. There is also a continuous increase in Jamaican island debt during this period (figure 11b). The number of enslaved people and the amount of cultivated land fell slowly prior to 1832, and so there was no sudden decline in the local economy (see figure A9 in the online appendix).

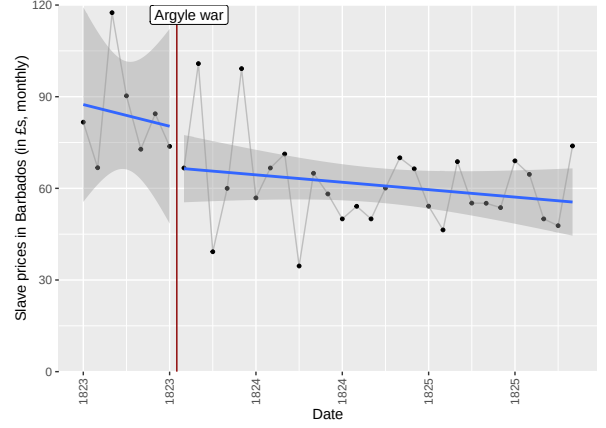
One concern is that revolts may have lowered asset values indirectly by increasing expectations that emancipation would occur. This is unlikely for two reasons. First, emancipation would have affected all colonies, while the slave-price evidence for Barbados and the results in table 10 show that the effects of revolts were local to the colonies in which they occurred. Second, the effect documented in figure 9 appears before emancipation had become a likely outcome: at that point, the abolitionist movement had only recently regrouped and remained focused on amelioration. For the same reason,

²⁴ As discussed earlier, enslaved people had become a relatively illiquid asset. Unfortunately, no corresponding information for land values appears in the records.

²⁵ The Argyle War refers to a series of slave revolts and general unrest, described by Craton (1982b) as having thousands of participants. Its start date is difficult to establish, but I follow historians in placing it around August 1823. The unrest fully ended in January 1824.



(a) Slave prices in Jamaica



(b) Slave prices in Barbados

FIGURE 9: Slave prices in Jamaica and Barbados. The time periods covered by the data and the frequency of coverage differ depending on the series. Panel (a) shows slave prices from *venditioni exponas* sales: court-mandated sales in which the proceeds were used to repay debts. These data are from the records of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, which reported them three times a year. A regression of $price = \alpha + \lambda_1 time + \lambda_2 post-revolt + \gamma time \times post-revolt$ yields a significant change in the series ($\gamma < 0$ and significant at the 5 percent level), using October 1823 as the first post-revolt period (since prices are reported for February, June and October only); see table A4 in the online appendix. Panel (b) shows monthly slave prices for Barbados, from sales by deeds of conveyance, as reported in the Slave Registers for the colony.

abolitionist activity is unlikely to explain the results: any general increase in abolitionist pressure should have affected Caribbean asset values as a common shock, rather than varying systematically with a constituency's exposure to slave revolts.

Another possibility is that revolts made the loss of an entire colony seem more plausible. The memory of Saint-Domingue, later Haiti, loomed large among slave owners. For absentee owners, this represented the most extreme version of the asset-value mechanism: their colonial investments might not merely decline in value, but be lost altogether. For owners resident in the Caribbean, the threat was broader, encompassing their social position, way of life, and physical safety.

7 Lobbying for compensated emancipation

This paper argues that following the fall in asset values, some slave owners would have embraced compensated emancipation (link 2 in (1)). This was the case with the Marquis of Chandos, who as chairman of the West India Committee was tasked with representing the interests of planters and slave owners. Despite opposing abolition for years, he

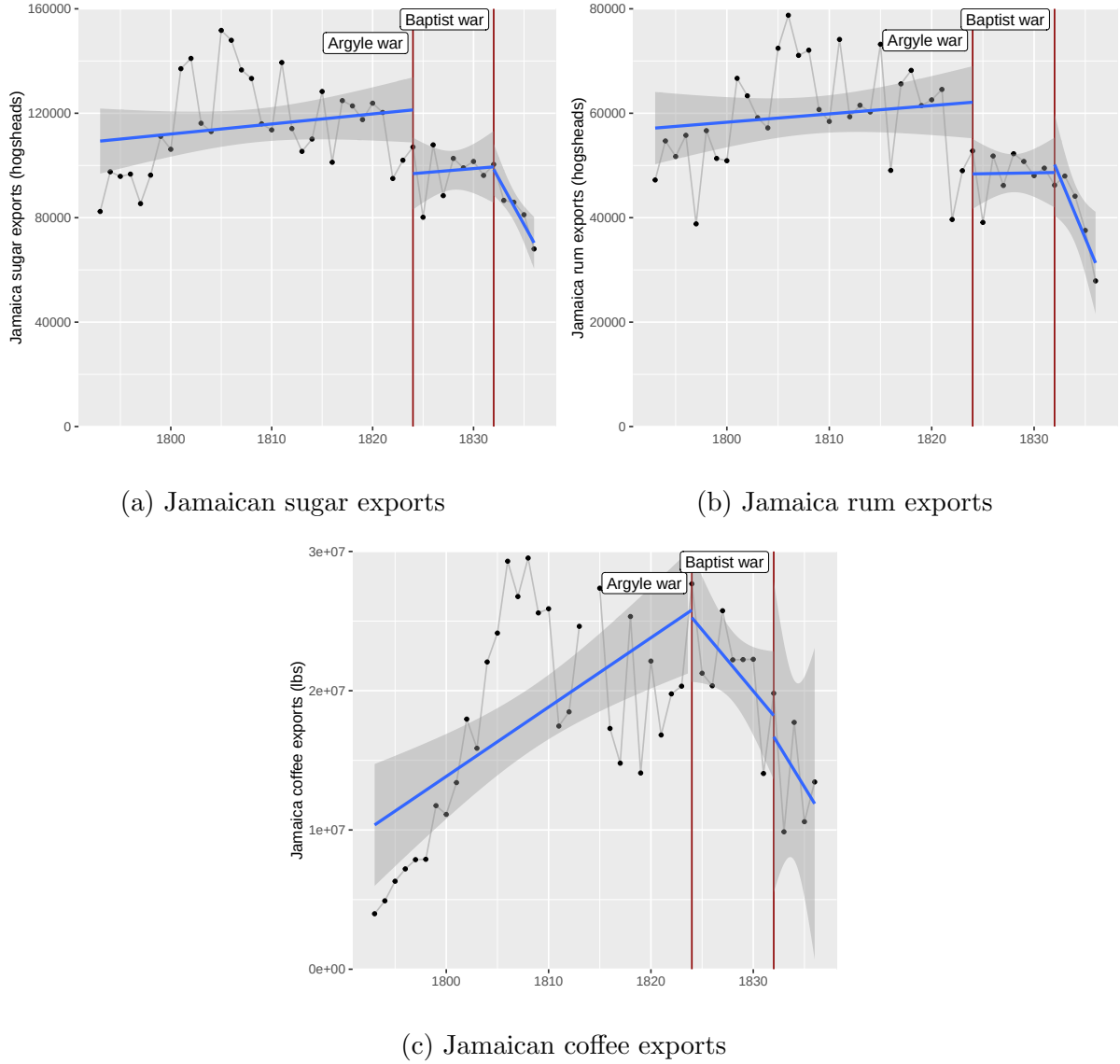


FIGURE 10: Jamaican exports, from the House of Assembly of Jamaica.

declared himself in favor of the emancipation bill in early 1833 (Taylor 2020, p.250). The timing of his conversion is suggestive, as abolitionists had been actively advocating for emancipation since 1830, and Chandos later claimed compensation for 379 enslaved people he held in Jamaica.

A systematic examination of the West India Committee's correspondence shows that Chandos was not an exception. In the months leading to the vote on the emancipation bill, when the government was effectively mediating a negotiation between abolitionists and supporters of slavery, the West Indians actively lobbied for compensation. As Butler (1995) explains, the discussion was about the amount of compensation and not its principle, which had long been agreed on by both sides (p.24). On 2 March 1833, the West

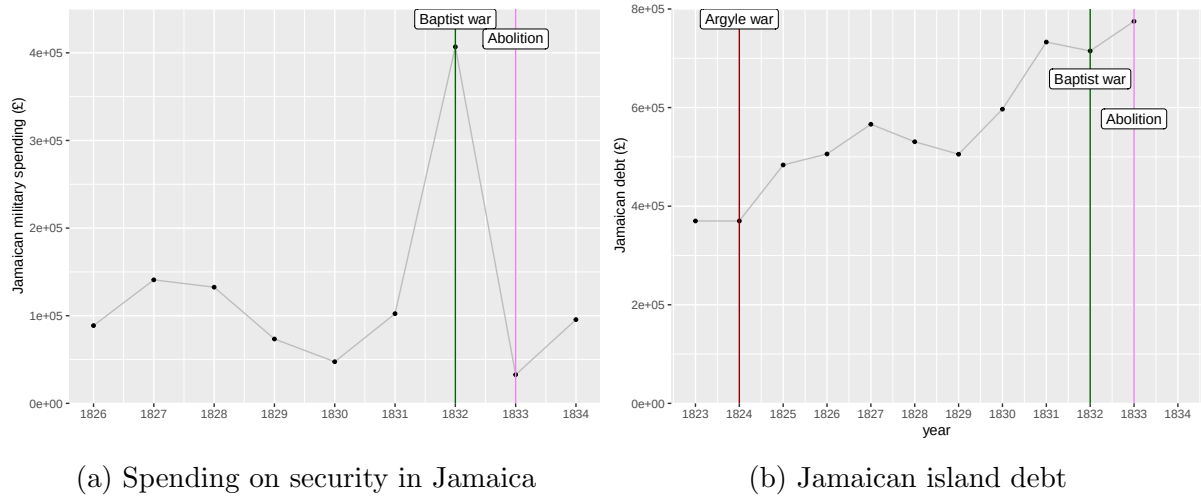


FIGURE 11: Jamaican government spending and financing, from the House of Assembly of Jamaica

India Committee wrote to the Colonial Secretary with comments on a draft of the emancipation bill.²⁶ A central theme in their response was the importance of compensation, while also referencing the recent slave revolt in Jamaica: “the imminence of the danger in the colonies renders it the more imperative upon the mother country, to enter equitably into the question of compensation”. They warned that colonial legislatures would not comply with emancipation unless it included compensation, and that “so great indeed, are the advantages to be expected from the co-operation of the West India proprietors, that the British people would willingly award a large compensation in order to secure an amicable settlement of the entire question”. On 23 April, they insisted that they did not oppose emancipation, but that planters “merely require a fair return upon the capital invested, and they would not oppose a change in the present system, provided it could be effected with safety, and without injury to private property”. They suggested that compensation should amount to £40 million. This was followed on 3 June with a detailed discussion of how assets would be valued, showing that the West Indians were closely involved in the drafting of the bill. Their goal was to value these assets at 1821 and 1822 prices, since values had fallen after that point.

By 15 June 1833, the votes that would shape the bill had started, and the West India Committee had settled on £20 million; Butler (1995) sees this as reflecting the Commit-

²⁶ The discussion that follows summarizes material from CO 318/116 held in the National Archives in London.

tee’s fear that by demanding too much they might get nothing. The Committee reminded the government that compensation would ensure that colonial legislatures would “apply themselves sincerely and in good faith to carry into effect emancipation”; without compensation, those legislatures might undermine emancipation in the same way they had undermined amelioration. By mid-July, the West India Committee had accepted £20 million and stated that, in return for parliament authorizing £20 million in compensation, it would recommend to its allies and to colonial authorities in the West Indies that they quickly pass laws to implement emancipation “safely, immediately, and effectually”. Contemporary assessments suggest that this was an acceptable settlement for slave owners. Butler (1995), for example, quotes Sir Lionel Smith, the governor of Barbados, who observed that, despite their public complaints, planters were very satisfied with the compensation deal on offer (p.24).

Although the principle of compensation had been raised in speeches before 1833, specific amounts were rarely mentioned. When they were, the context suggests that they served a rhetorical purpose rather than forming part of serious proposals. Once emancipation became a concrete legislative possibility, however, the proposed value converged to £20 million very quickly, as shown in figure 12.

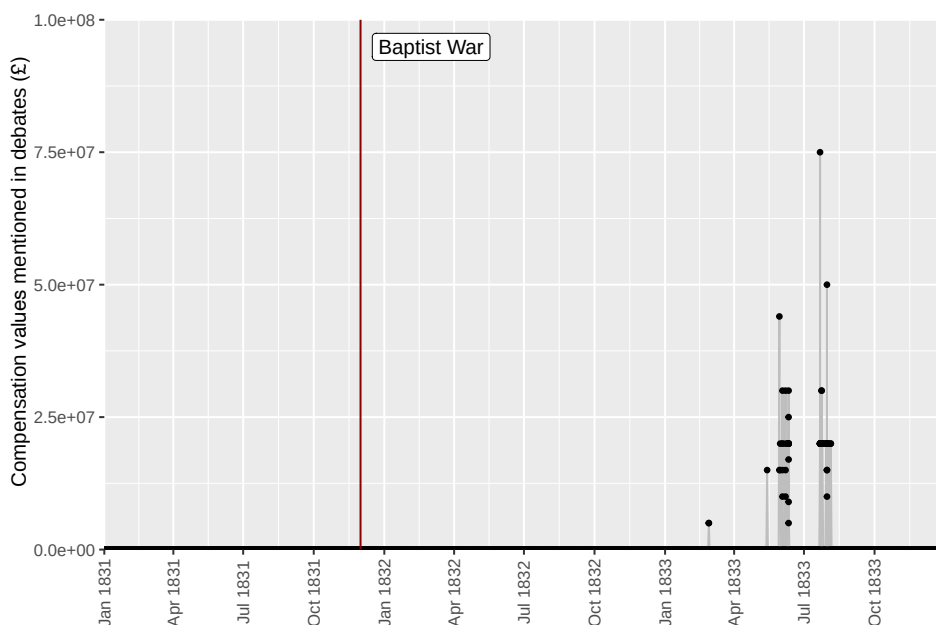


FIGURE 12: Compensation values mentioned in parliamentary debates, calculated using the data in Eggers and Spirling (2014).

8 Why did MPs vote for emancipation?

The next step in the argument is that slave owners' acceptance of compensated emancipation translated into parliamentary support for the bill (link 3 in (1)). To examine this link, I use two sources of evidence: whether local candidates in the 1832 election pledged to support emancipation if elected, and the number of pro-abolition petitions sent to the House of Commons. Both indicate that the shift in parliamentary support for emancipation in 1833 cannot be explained by popular pressure for emancipation. Instead, the evidence is consistent with MPs supporting compensated emancipation because slave owners lobbied them to do so.

8.1 Pledges and the votes for emancipation

Before the 1832 election that produced the parliament that passed the emancipation bill, the abolitionist movement asked candidates to pledge that they would vote for emancipation if elected. Several pro-abolition publications circulated lists of pledged candidates to guide voters. I use the lists published in the abolitionist periodical "The Tourist" on 24 September, 3 December 1832 and 17 December 1832, to identify (i) which constituencies had at least one candidate who pledged to support emancipation and (ii) which constituencies elected a pledged candidate. This allows me to examine whether the effect of slave revolts on emancipation was through the election of more pro-abolition MPs.

The results are reported in table 12. Columns 1 and 2 show that exposure to slave revolts did not affect the likelihood that a pledged candidate ran in a constituency. This suggests that highly exposed constituencies were not more likely to attract committed abolitionist candidates, nor did candidates in these areas appear to view a public abolitionist pledge as electorally advantageous. Columns 3 and 4 restrict the sample to constituencies with at least one pledged candidate, and show that exposure to slave revolts did not affect the likelihood that a pledged candidate won, although these results may lack sufficient statistical power. This further suggests that highly exposed constituencies did not systematically elect abolitionist MPs. If the parliamentary shift in 1833 had been driven by local anti-slavery opinion, more exposed constituencies should have been more likely to elect pledged candidates, but this was not the case.²⁷

²⁷ Similarly, if reverse causality were a concern because pro-abolition sentiment in a

Table 12: MPs pledged to support emancipation (by constituency)

Dependent Variables: Model:	pledged candidate in i (1)	pledged candidate in i (2)	pledged candidate won in i (3)	pledged candidate won in i (4)
<i>Variables</i>				
$\ln \text{ owners affected}_i$	-0.0906 (0.0563)		-0.0846 (0.1080)	
$\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_i$		-0.0883 (0.0556)		-0.0831 (0.1037)
$\ln \text{ sugar exports}_{i,1823}$	0.0126 (0.0077)	0.0124 (0.0076)	-0.0028 (0.0152)	-0.0029 (0.0151)
$\ln \text{ petitions}_{i,1823}$	0.1242 ⁺ (0.0662)	0.1233 ⁺ (0.0662)	0.1863 (0.1260)	0.1847 (0.1257)
owners_i	0.0013 ⁺ (0.0008)	0.0013 ⁺ (0.0008)	-0.0013 (0.0009)	-0.0013 (0.0009)
$\text{new constituency}_i$	0.2236* (0.1064)	0.2228* (0.1066)	0.1008 (0.1872)	0.0994 (0.1862)
MP slave owner_i	0.0922 (0.1560)	0.0917 (0.1563)	-0.1213 (0.2291)	-0.1207 (0.2300)
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	81	81
R ²	0.42760	0.42729	0.45720	0.45702
Within R ²	0.09120	0.09072	0.14723	0.14695
Sample	all const	all const	const with pledged candidate(s)	const with pledged candidate(s)

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *pledged candidate in i* is a dummy that equals 1 if at least one candidate standing in constituency i in the 1832 election pledged to support emancipation if elected. *pledged candidate won in i* is a dummy that equals 1 if at least one pledged candidate was elected. All other variables are as defined in table 3.

However, many of the unpledged candidates who were elected went on to vote for compensated emancipation. Table 13 shows that most MPs who voted on the pro-abolition side were unpledged; in fact, over a quarter of unpledged MPs ended up supporting emancipation.²⁸ Why did so many unpledged MPs support emancipation? It is unlikely constituency helped trigger a slave revolt, I would expect a positive relationship between exposure to revolts and both the presence and election of pledged candidates. Table A6 in the online appendix shows that controlling for pledged candidates makes the coefficient on the exposure measures more significant.

²⁸ This is based on the minority lists, where $\text{Votes (binary)} = 0$ is a residual category. Recall that MPs were often absent from Westminster and that only the minority lists are available, so when an MP does not show up in a pro-abolition minority list, it can either be because he voted against emancipation or did not vote, perhaps because he was not in parliament on that day.

Table 13: Voting on the pro-abolition side in June-July 1833 abolition-related divisions, by candidate pledge status.

	Constituencies		MPs	
	Votes (binary)		Votes (binary)	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
not pledged	87	48	179	64
pledged	16	41	31	46

that they were simply responding to a sudden increase in local support for emancipation. The interval between the election of December 1832 and the abolition-related divisions of June–July 1833 was short, and this explanation would require local opinion to have moved rapidly from opposition or indifference to support. It is also unclear what would have produced such a change, since the Baptist War had occurred before both the pledges and the election.

A more plausible explanation is that unpledged MPs were responding to other pressures, including lobbying from slave owners who supported emancipation in return for compensation. This interpretation is also consistent with the timing. Before the terms of emancipation were known, slave owners had reason to prefer candidates who were not publicly committed to emancipation, since pledged candidates might support emancipation on terms less favorable to slave owners. Once a favorable compensation package was on the table, these less committed MPs could be pressured to support their preferred plan.

8.2 Petitioning

At the time, petitions were a common means of lobbying parliament. They were often organized locally by dignitaries, who called a meeting to discuss the issue of the petition and coordinate signatures (Huzzey 2019). Slave owners could have influenced petitioning either by helping to organize these efforts or by obstructing them. I check for the effect of slave revolts on petitioning by using information on the number and geographic origin of pro-abolition petitions sent to parliament between 1823 and 1832. I focus on pro-abolition petitions, as only a small number of anti-abolition petitions were submitted during this period. To exploit the time variation in petitioning, I define $owners\ affected_{i,t}$ as the number of slave owners in constituency i who held enslaved people in colonies that

experienced slave revolts in the previous year, $t - 1$. The one year lag is to account for the time required for the information to reach Britain and the petitions to be written and sent. The regressions include constituency and year effects, the latter to capture country-wide shocks to petitioning.

Table 14 tests whether a revolt in a given colony increased petitioning in English and Welsh constituencies linked to that colony through slaveholding. Column 1 shows the main panel regression. Since the specification includes constituency fixed effects, the coefficient is identified from changes within a constituency over time. The exposure variable is positive only in years after a revolt occurred in a colony where local owners held enslaved people. A negative coefficient therefore indicates that revolts reduced petitioning in exposed constituencies relative to their petitioning in other years. Column 2 repeats the estimation using the exposure measure. Column 3 and 4 control for a lag of the dependent variable and correct for the bias this introduces by using a GMM procedure. Across all four specifications, a revolt is associated with fewer pro-abolition petitions being submitted. This is consistent with the suppression of popular pressure for emancipation.

Two econometric issues remain. The first is that treatment is staggered, introducing what is now a well understood source of bias. Unfortunately, common correction methods proved to be underpowered. Second, it is possible that the results are masking potentially interesting heterogeneity across time and colonies. To address these concerns, column 5 starts the sample after the Guiana revolt and column 6 stops before Jamaica's Baptist War. The results are very similar to those in columns 1 and 2, even if the coefficient in column 5 is not significant; this is likely because 1832 is the only post-revolt year in the sample.

This shows that slave revolts were followed by declines in pro-abolition petitioning in constituencies that were more exposed, a pattern inconsistent with the notion of a local population demanding emancipation. Instead, my interpretation is that local elites restricted petitioning by local groups in an attempt to weaken the bargaining power of the abolitionist movement. In 1824, after the Guiana revolt, the main issue at stake was amelioration, which threatened to reduce the profitability of slave ownership. In 1832, after the Baptist War revolt, the debate was about compensation and apprenticeship. At this juncture, slave owners were seeking to extract the most favorable terms possible from the abolitionists in parliament.

Table 14: Slave revolts and petitions for abolition, panel (by constituency)

Dependent Variable: Model:	(1)	(2)	petitions for abolition _{i,t}		(5)	(6)
			(3)	(4)		
<i>Variables</i>						
$\ln \text{ owners affected}_{i,t}$	-0.0743* (0.0367)		-0.1203* (0.0556)		-0.0667 (0.0497)	-0.0674+ (0.0374)
$\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_{i,t}$		-0.0750* (0.0371)		-0.1272* (0.0575)		
petitions for abolition _{i,t-1}			0.2747 (0.3521)	0.2745 (0.3520)		
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Observations</i>						
Constituencies	192	192	192	192	192	192
Years	10	10	10	10	8	8
Transformed GMM obs			1608	1608		
Instruments (#)			11	11		
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
AR(1) p-value			0.007	0.007		
AR(2) p-value			0.127	0.126		
Hansen p-value			0.291	0.292		
Method	OLS	OLS	GMM	GMM	OLS	OLS
Standard errors	clustered	clustered	robust	robust	clustered	clustered
Sample	1823-32	1823-32	1823-32	1823-32	1825-32	1823-30
Revolts	large revolts	large revolts	large revolts	large revolts	large revolts	large revolts

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. The models in columns 3 and 4 are estimated using a one-step difference GMM with a collapsed instrument set, using the command `pdynmc()` in R. Corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. The variable $\ln \text{ owners affected}_{i,t}$ is equal to the log number of owners who lived in constituency i and had enslaved people in colonies with revolts in period $t - 1$. $\ln \text{ owners' exposure}_{i,t}$ is calculated similarly. When calculating these variables, I lag the revolts measure by one year because of the time required for news of a revolt to reach Britain and then translate into petitioning activity. For example, for the Baptist War revolt of December 1831 - January 1832, I expect to see the effect in 1832. For the Guiana revolt of August 1823, I expect to see the effect in 1824. Large revolts refers to all revolts with at least 1,000 participants. Column (5) starts the sample in 1825 to exclude the Guiana revolt, while column (6) ends in 1830 to exclude the Baptist War.

9 The role of the abolitionist movement

The previous section showed that MPs' support for emancipation cannot be explained simply as a response to public pressure. But this does not imply that the abolitionist movement was unimportant. Abolitionists played a central role in making slavery a public moral and political issue, and their efforts help explain why slavery became politically vulnerable. My argument is instead that abolitionist pressure alone cannot explain why MPs from constituencies more exposed to slave revolts were more likely to support emancipation. To explain this, the analysis focuses on slave owners, many of whom remained unmoved by humanitarian arguments, but became willing to accept compensated emancipation once their economic incentives had changed.

A related possibility is that the results reflect not abolitionist pressure itself, but the institutional changes that allowed changing views on slavery to be translated into

parliamentary support for emancipation. In 1832, the Great Reform Act created new constituencies, eliminated others, and altered the size of the electorate in many of the surviving constituencies.²⁹ Many of the new constituencies were sympathetic to emancipation, and their MPs first entered parliament after the general election of December 1832. Could the combination of changing attitudes and electoral reform explain the results in this paper? Three facts suggest that it cannot.

First, all regressions control for whether a constituency was created by the Great Reform Act.³⁰ Second, although the elimination of old seats may have reduced the pro-slavery vote and shifted the balance of power in parliament toward pro-abolition areas, those constituencies are not included in the sample. Their elimination therefore cannot be driving the estimates. Third, although the Great Reform Act changed voting eligibility, the overall increase in the electorate was modest, and about a third of surviving constituencies actually lost voters (Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2025; Fresh 2024). Some constituencies nevertheless experienced large increases in the electorate, raising the possibility that new voters tipped them toward emancipation. If this was the case, constituencies with the largest increases should have been more likely to support emancipation. Table 15 shows that they were not.

10 Why emancipation did not happen sooner

The main analysis focuses on how MPs voted in the 1833 abolition-related divisions. Yet there had been large slave revolts decades earlier and, as figure 1 shows, slavery was frequently debated in the House of Commons. Why did emancipation not happen sooner? The framework in section 2 suggests that institutional change often requires both popular mobilization and a settlement that makes reform acceptable to those who benefit from the existing institution. Before the early 1830s, these conditions had not been met.

First, although there had been slave revolts for decades, they became more threatening after 1820: they involved more enslaved people, occurred in colonies with larger enslaved

²⁹ At the time, not all areas of the country had representation (Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2025; Gash 1953).

³⁰ These constituencies were created in 1832, after the Baptist War, and there is no evidence that slave revolts affected the details of electoral reform.

Table 15: The Great Reform Act: changes in the number of voters and constituency support for emancipation

Dependent Variable: Model:	(1)	(2)	Votes _i (binary)	
			(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners affected _i	0.1741* (0.0692)		0.2239** (0.0806)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1776* (0.0680)		0.2274** (0.0800)
change in voters _i	3.98×10^{-5} (2.51×10^{-5})	3.94×10^{-5} (2.49×10^{-5})	3.23×10^{-5} (4.57×10^{-5})	3.12×10^{-5} (4.55×10^{-5})
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0098 (0.0094)	-0.0101 (0.0094)	-0.0145 (0.0114)	-0.0147 (0.0115)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0032 (0.0729)	-0.0035 (0.0726)	-0.0181 (0.0996)	-0.0172 (0.0995)
owners _i	-0.0013 ⁺ (0.0008)	-0.0014 ⁺ (0.0008)	-0.0018* (0.0009)	-0.0018* (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1064 (0.1251)	0.1098 (0.1250)	0.1049 (0.1528)	0.1056 (0.1524)
MP slave owner _i	-0.0954 (0.1624)	-0.0969 (0.1615)	-0.2563 (0.1896)	-0.2563 (0.1883)
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	146	146
R ²	0.33135	0.33309	0.37056	0.37271
Within R ²	0.07946	0.08185	0.10950	0.11254
Sample	all	all	only increased voters	only increased voters

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. The variable *change in voters_i* is calculated using the number of voters for each constituency before and after the Great Reform Act. When the constituency existed in both periods, this is calculated without regard to the boundary changes implemented in 1832. If the constituency was new in 1832, then the pre-reform number of voters is set to 0. The source for these data is Aidt and Leon-Ablan (2025). The rest of the variables are as described in the note to table 3.

populations, and affected a larger number of owners in Britain. Figure 13a captures this pattern by multiplying revolt intensity by the enslaved population of the affected colony. Figure 13b instead multiplies revolt intensity by the number of owners in England and Wales who held enslaved people in affected colonies.³¹ Both measures rise exponentially over time. These later revolts posed a greater threat because they endangered more valuable colonial assets and implicated a larger group of British owners.

Second, prior to 1830, the abolitionist movement had not yet made full emancipation its central demand, instead pursuing a policy of amelioration. This meant that there were no concrete proposals for compensation on the table. Amelioration proved unsuccessful: the government in London weakened the policies proposed by the abolitionists, and colonial administrations then largely ignored the measures they were supposed to enforce. In

³¹ Enslaved people and slave owners are measured in 1833. This likely overstates the reach of earlier revolts, thereby understating the increase in the reach of revolts over time.

1830, frustrated by this lack of progress, the abolitionist movement shifted its goal to full emancipation (Gross 1980).

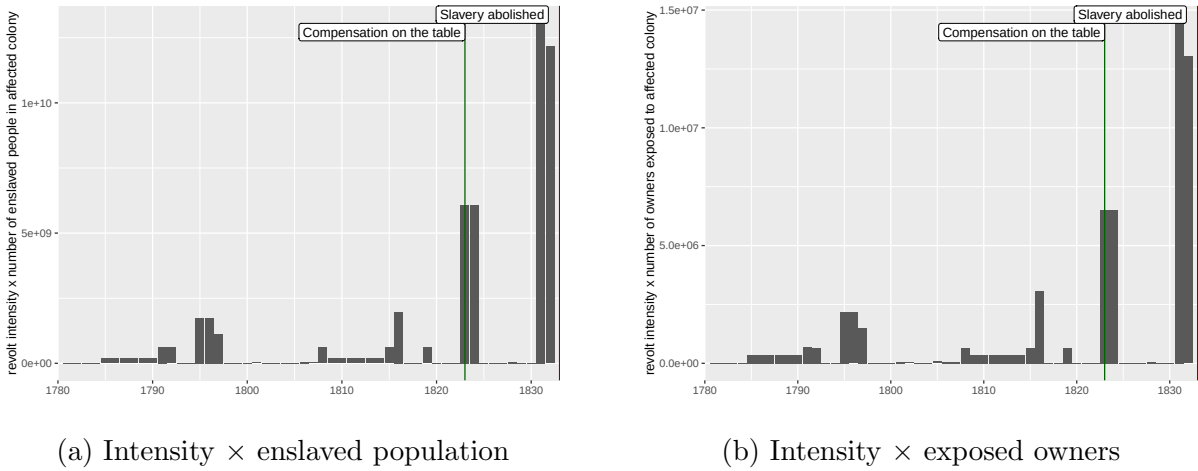


FIGURE 13: Intensity and reach of slave revolts. Intensity is a scale based on the size categories in Craton (1982b): dozens is set to 50, hundreds to 500, thousands to 5,000, and many thousands to 10,000. For comparison, an estimated 60,000 enslaved people participated in the Baptist War of 1831-32.

Third, although abolitionists had accepted the principle of compensation from 1823, no clear or credible offer emerged until much later. Compensation was frequently mentioned in parliament, but discussions rarely specified an amount. Figure 12 shows that serious negotiations over the size of compensation began only after the Baptist War. This is consistent with the revolt pushing the West India Committee to engage seriously with negotiations over an acceptable emancipation bill.

11 Discussion

This article shows that slave revolts in the Caribbean helped shift parliamentary support in favor of emancipation by changing the economic incentives of slave owners. Revolts reduced the value of Caribbean assets in affected colonies, making compensated emancipation increasingly attractive to slave owners who were financially exposed to these colonies. Many of these owners belonged to Britain's economic and political elite, and this enabled them to pressure MPs to support an emancipation bill that was, in important respects, a bailout. Emancipation was therefore made possible not only by abolitionists' willingness to offer compensation, but also by enslaved people's success in making slavery less valuable to those who owned them. The results support a revised version of the

Williams (1944) economic hypothesis: emancipation was partly an economic decision, but one shaped by the financial consequences of enslaved people's resistance. The paper therefore formulates and tests an economic mechanism through which slave revolts helped bring British Caribbean slavery to an end.

More generally, the paper illustrates how pressure from below can reshape bargaining among elites. When mobilization lowers the value of an institution for the elites who benefit from it, reform becomes easier to secure because the gap between the status quo and the alternative narrows. The argument therefore highlights a broader trade-off: more disruptive mobilization, more attractive alternatives, and larger compensation can each make institutional reform more likely. This helps explain why mobilization leads to institutional change in some cases but not in others.

The framework can also help explain why emancipation followed different paths elsewhere. The United States, for example, experienced major slave revolts, including the 1811 German Coast uprising in Louisiana and Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion in Virginia. Yet, unlike in Britain, these revolts did not generate serious proposals for compensated emancipation before the Civil War (Goldin 1973). Enslaved resistance became decisive for emancipation only once the Civil War transformed the political and military context, as enslaved people fled plantations, withdrew their labor, and served in the Union Army (Du Bois 1935).

Several factors prevented the North and South from reaching a compromise on slavery before the Civil War. First, Southern slave owners remained firmly opposed to emancipation, partly because Britain's post-emancipation Caribbean decline served as a warning (Rugemer 2008). Second, many Southern slave owners lived on their plantations, so emancipation threatened not only their wealth but also their way of life, and the social and racial hierarchies on which it rested (Goldin 1973). These costs did not apply in the same way to British absentee slave owners who lived an ocean away from the colonies. Southern slave owners therefore had less reason to view compensated emancipation as an acceptable bargain.

The expected financial cost was also much larger. Goldin (1973) estimates that, in 1860, compensation would have required \$2.7 billion, compared with a US annual national product of approximately \$4.2 billion. Relative to the size of the national economy, this was much larger than Britain's £20 million compensation package. Compensation in the

United States would also have entailed a substantial transfer from the North to the South. Britain had no similarly clear geographic divide, since slave owners were distributed throughout the country. Lincoln eventually proposed compensated emancipation in 1862, once the costs of the Civil War had become clearer. By then, however, it was too late, and no slave state took the offer. The District of Columbia, which was under congressional authority, was the only US jurisdiction to adopt compensated emancipation.

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Slave Revolts and Emancipation: Evidence from the British Empire

Supporting information

Online appendix

(Not for publication)

A Data sources

- Slave revolts: these data are from Craton (1982b), who classifies British Caribbean slave revolts into four categories based on the number of participants: A (dozens), B (hundreds), C (thousands) and D (many thousands).
- Individuals affected and exposed: calculated using the information in the Legacies of British Slavery database (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>).
- Sugar exports: from Mohan and Strobl (2013) and Bensassi, Mohan, and Strobl (2017), who collected this information from the Parliamentary Papers.
- Hurricane index: from Mohan and Strobl (2013) and Bensassi, Mohan, and Strobl (2017).
- Parliamentary debates: from the historical Hansard (<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html>) and from Eggers and Spirling (2014).
- Newspapers: from the British Newspaper Archive (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>).
- Pledges: from the anti-slavery publication *The Tourist*; I use the volumes published on 24 September, 3 December and 17 December 1832.
- Number of voters: from Aidt and Leon-Ablan (2025).
- Petitions: from the Journals of the House of Commons, following the list created by Huzzey and Miller (2020).
- Slave prices in Jamaica: from the annual volumes of the House of Assembly of Jamaica. The prices are for enslaved people auctioned following the liquidation of estates that had gone bankrupt.
- Number of enslaved people in Jamaica: from the annual volumes of the House of Assembly of Jamaica.
- Land cultivated in Jamaica: from the annual volumes of the House of Assembly of Jamaica.
- Sugar, rum and coffee exports from Jamaica: from the annual volumes of the House of Assembly of Jamaica.

- Security spending and debt in Jamaica: calculated from the financial statements published in the annual volumes of the House of Assembly of Jamaica.
- Slave prices in Barbados: prices for enslaved people sold by deeds of conveyance, from the Barbados slave registers. Figure A1 shows a page from these registers.
- Fractionalization (the IV): this is constructed using the shipments of enslaved people from different embarkation points in Africa to the different British colonies in the Caribbean. I use the data in SlaveVoyages.org. Figure A3 shows the embarkation points, which for the calculations outlined in section 5.6 represent the ‘ethnicity’ of an enslaved person.
- Enslaved people by constituency: the number of enslaved people owned by residents of a constituency, calculated using the information in the Legacies of British Slavery database (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>).
- MP slave owners: whether the MP owned enslaved people, from the tables in Draper (2010).
- Owners: the number of slave owners, calculated from the information in the UCL Legacies of British Slavery Project (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>).
- Number of enslaved people in each colony: calculated from the information in the UCL Legacies of British Slavery Project (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>).
- New constituency: from the list in Philbin (1965).
- Population in 1823: values interpolated from the 1821 and 1831 censuses. For the new borough constituencies that were created in 1832 by the Great Reform Act, the population for 1821 and 1831 is calculated by aggregating the population of the parishes, towns and townships that make up the constituency; these population numbers are reported in the 1821 and 1831 censuses.
- Population in 1832: values interpolated from the 1831 and 1841 censuses. For the new borough constituencies that were created in 1832 by the Great Reform Act, the population for 1831 is calculated by aggregating the population of the parishes,

towns and townships that make up the constituency; these population numbers are reported in the 1831 census.

- Voters in the 1832 election: from Appendix 3 in Salmon (2002).
- Mortality: from table 9.1 in Higman (1984).

FIGURE A1: Page from the Barbados slave registers

A.1 Matching compensation claims to constituencies

The matching of slave owners to constituencies requires some choices. First, some addresses in the Legacies of British Slavery database refer to towns and cities (e.g. Bristol), and it is difficult to establish where in the town or city these individuals lived. When the location matches that of an existing borough constituency, I assume the individual lived in the constituency. When the location does not match, I assign the individuals to the nearest possible borough constituency, where the distance is to the constituency's centroid. The average distance to the nearest constituency is 5 km. The main results are robust to dropping all owners who are more than 10 km from a borough centroid.

The mechanism I emphasize – elite influence over MP choices – is unlikely to have been constrained by the constituency boundaries. A powerful slave owner living just outside a constituency could have had more influence over an MP than someone inside

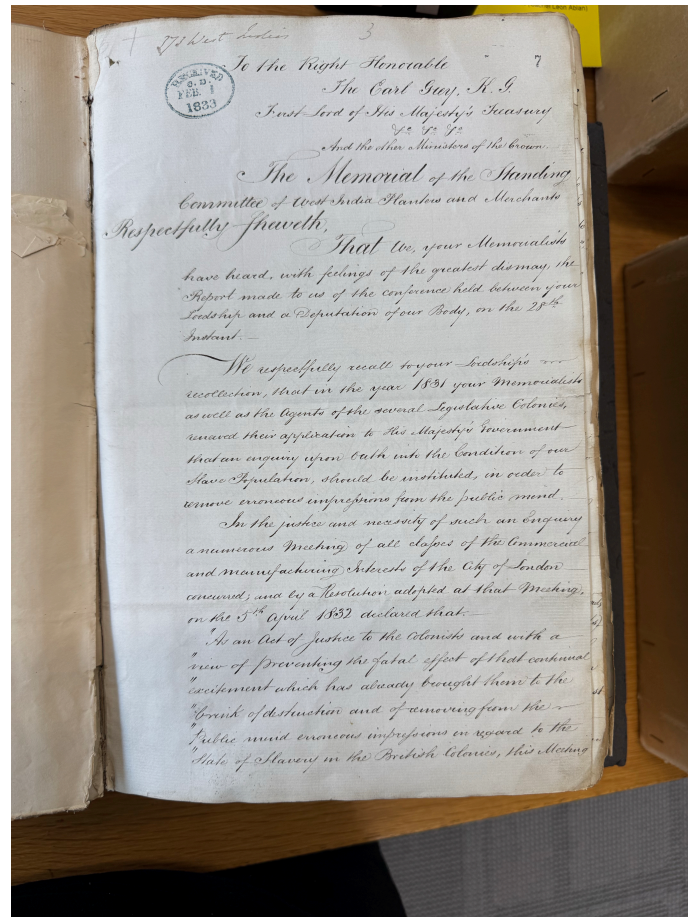


FIGURE A2: Page from the West India Committee letters



FIGURE A3: Points of origin of slave voyages (screen capture from SlaveVoyages.org)

the constituency who only barely met the voting qualification, or someone who could not vote at all.

For the robustness checks that include the county constituencies, the matching is more straightforward: owners are assigned to the county corresponding to their home address. The weighted measures, for instance sugar exports, are then calculated using the information for owners assigned to that county. There is double counting in that owners appear in both borough and county constituencies, while in practice not all would have been eligible to vote in both (the voting qualifications differed). Unfortunately, I am unable to determine in which constituencies individual owners were eligible to vote.

B Caribbean slave revolts

The information below is from Craton (1982b) and Taylor (2020).

- Very large (many thousands of enslaved people participated):
 - **Guiana (August 1823)**: The rebellion started in the area just east of the Demerara river on 18 August 1823 and lasted two days. It was led by a number of enslaved individuals including Quamina and Jack Gladstone, apparently with the aim of securing the rights they incorrectly believed the British parliament had granted them. The local authorities blamed John Smith, an English missionary, for helping incite the rebellion. He was executed, and this possible miscarriage of justice was the subject of a heated debate in the House of Commons in London.
 - **The Baptist War revolt in Jamaica (December 1831-January 1832)**: This was the largest and most destructive slave revolt in the history of the British Caribbean. It was organized by Samuel Sharpe, and surviving accounts suggest that he did not intend it to become so violent or destructive. The uprising began on December 27, 1831, with a fire at the Kensington plantation, high in the hills above Montego Bay. The fire was intended as a signal, and the revolt soon spread across the northwest of the island. Its main motivation appears to have been the demand that enslaved people be paid for their labor.
- Large (thousands of enslaved people participated):
 - **Argyle war slave revolt in Jamaica (Summer 1823-early 1824)**: clandestine meetings of enslaved people and widespread unrest.
 - **Antigua (March 1831)**: Widespread unrest and arson after the banning of Sunday markets.

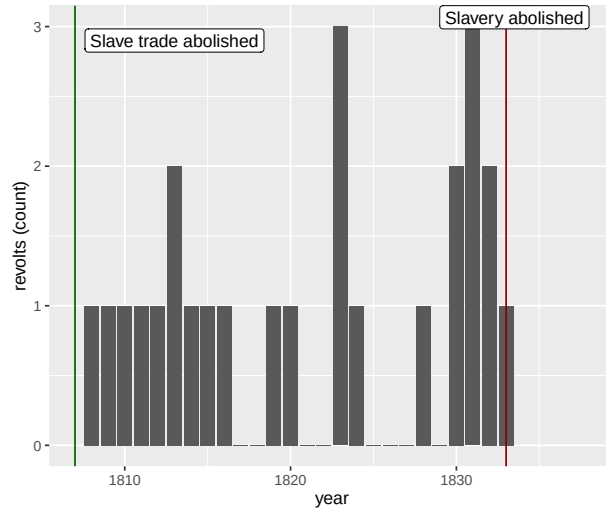


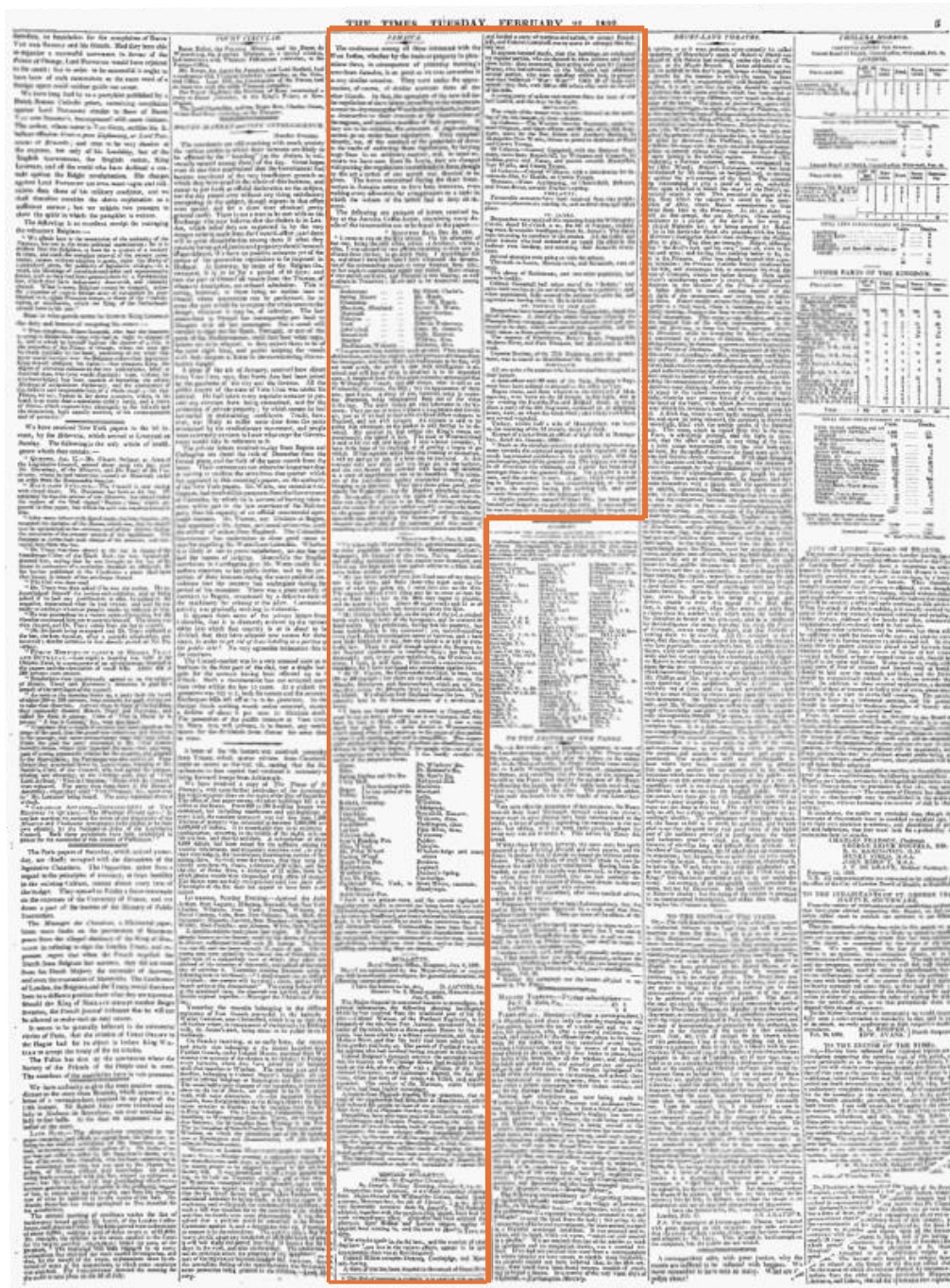
FIGURE A4: All slave revolts in the British Caribbean

C Information constraints

At this time, the diffusion of information across the Atlantic was slow. News from the colonies would arrive by boat, often at least 4 weeks after the events had taken place (Mohan and Strobl 2013; Bensassi, Mohan, and Strobl 2017). Slave owners based in Britain would have learned about important events in the colonies through their agents and managers, and important news like large slave revolts and hurricanes received substantial coverage in the newspapers. For example, the Times of London reported extensively on Jamaica’s Baptist War, but its first report was on 20 February 1832, more than a month after the revolt had ended.

D Newspaper reports

The news of the Baptist War revolt in Jamaica (December 1831 - January 1832) was first reported in the Times of London on Monday, 20 February 1832, more than a month after the unrest had ended. The following is a page from the 21 February edition, where a detailed report of the rebellion can be found in columns 3 and 4. Source: The Times of London archive.



E Enslaved people by colony

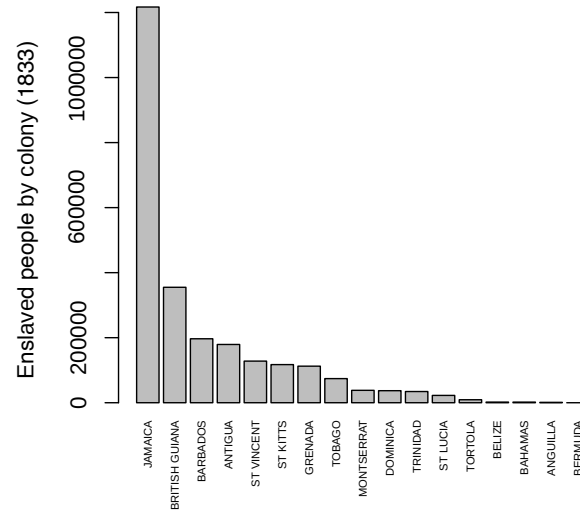


FIGURE A5: Enslaved people by colony in 1833, calculated using the UCL Legacies of British Slavery data.

F Compensation and Apprenticeship

Many abolitionists supported compensation. Some did because they regarded property rights as central to British liberty; others saw compensation as a necessary price for securing emancipation (Scanlan 2020, p.281). Some also feared that without compensation, colonies like Jamaica might declare independence to preempt abolition. Buxton and other abolitionist leaders worried that refusing compensation would rule out a compromise with the West India interest, making it impossible to pass an emancipation bill in 1833 and potentially delaying emancipation for many years (p.284). This concern was well founded: Edward Smith-Stanley, the Colonial Secretary and cabinet minister responsible for colonial affairs, believed that the costs of emancipation should not fall on planters (p.284). And without government support there could be no emancipation.

With regard to the amount of compensation, in 1825 the Anti-Slavery Society estimated that around £33.6 million would be required (Draper 2010, p.95). The amount that was eventually agreed in 1833 was £20 million. There appears to have been quick convergence to this value, as was shown in figure 12 in the main text. Rules were developed to determine how the money would be distributed across colonies, taking into account both the number of enslaved people and their roles, such as whether they were servants or field workers. Since 1812, colonial authorities had been required to keep detailed slave registers identifying the owner of each enslaved person, which limited the scope for manipulating the compensation process.

The offer of compensation was credible because enforcement depended on reciprocal commitments. As the West India Committee repeatedly reminded the government, emancipation could not be implemented in practice without the cooperation of local colonial assemblies. At the same time, if those assemblies refused to implement emancipation after an agreement had been reached, the government in London could refuse to pay compensation. Compensation therefore helped solve the credibility problem: colonial authorities had an incentive to enforce emancipation only if the metropole paid, while the metropole had an incentive to pay only if colonial authorities complied.

Emancipation entailed a period of apprenticeship during which formerly enslaved people were required to continue working for their former owners. An early draft of the emancipation bill required them to do so for 12 years, ostensibly while ‘learning’ to

be free (Matthews 2006, p.171). In effect, this would have required enslaved people to pay for their own freedom through their labor. The issue was debated until the final stages of negotiation, with the apprenticeship period eventually reduced to 8 years. The abolitionists accepted apprenticeship as a compromise necessary to secure emancipation.

G The parliamentary votes

For most parliamentary divisions in this period, individual-level voting records are unavailable. Hansard recorded the names of MPs for fewer than a quarter of all divisions. The divisions for which names were recorded do not appear to have been selected systematically; for example, they show no clear pattern by topic or by the expected size of the minority. Moreover, when individual names were recorded, parliamentary convention was to list only the minority side. This reflects the voting procedure in the Commons at the time: there was only one division lobby, and it was used for the presumed minority.

I collected all slavery-related divisions between 1823 and 1833 for which minority lists are available. The debates preceding these divisions are available in the historical Hansard (<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html>), except for Brougham’s motion, for which I use Cobbett’s *Parliamentary Debates* (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x004332593&seq=602>). It is important to note that Hansard did not yet provide a systematic verbatim record of parliamentary debates. The published accounts are closer to summaries that capture the main points made by the most prominent speakers. Gross (1980) provides a full discussion of these debates and their context.

My goal is to identify divisions that are informative about MPs’ support for emancipation. My starting point is seven divisions in June and July 1833 for which the minority lists are available. The subsections below summarize each of these divisions and explain how I interpret an MP’s appearance on the minority list.³² In all seven cases, appearing on this list is evidence that the MP supported emancipation.

The main dependent variable uses the three committee-stage divisions in which Buxton voted with the minority: July 24, July 25, and July 31b. These divisions took place after the bill had passed its second reading, and so the broad terms of the settlement had been agreed. Voting with Buxton in any of these three divisions is therefore the clearest available evidence that an MP supported the official abolitionist position. The article’s main results are robust to using a broader measure that includes all divisions that can be clearly assigned to the pro-abolition side (June 10, July 24, July 25, and July 31b), and a measure that uses all slavery-related divisions that took place in July, after the bill’s

³² The summaries below were produced using ChatGPT-4, with the exception of the summary of Brougham’s motion, which I produced from Cobbett’s.

second reading and so once the likely settlement had been agreed.

These measures could contain some error. First, some MPs who supported emancipation may not appear on a minority list because they missed the division or supported emancipation under different terms. Aggregating across several divisions helps address this concern. Second, MPs with more extreme views may be misclassified. This is unlikely to be the case for extreme pro-slavery MPs: voting for an abolitionist position in the hope of making the bill collapse would have been a risky strategy, and one that ultimately did not succeed. Radical abolitionists, however, may have voted against compromises supported by mainstream abolitionists, perhaps hoping for a more radical reform. These MPs would appear in the data as not supporting emancipation, even though they in fact did. This measurement error is unlikely to drive the results. First, there were relatively few radical abolitionists in parliament. Second, even if these MPs all represented constituencies with few or no owners exposed to revolts, the results would still require substantial support for emancipation among MPs from constituencies with exposed owners. Finally, the measures capture support for compensated emancipation, and the results show that exposure to slave revolts was a strong predictor of such support. Opposition, by contrast, could come from both committed pro-slavery MPs and committed anti-slavery MPs who objected to its terms.

G.1 June 10 1833

Summary: The House of Commons debate on June 10, 1833 focused on the terms of emancipation as Britain moved toward abolishing slavery. Central to the discussion was a proposed resolution to reclassify enslaved individuals as “apprenticed laborers” who would gain some freedoms while still being required to work under parliament-defined conditions. Mr. Fowell Buxton argued forcefully for immediate and total emancipation, citing moral imperatives and successful examples of freed slaves working for wages. Opposing views, including those from Mr. Baring, advocated for gradualism and raised economic and social concerns. A significant moment in the debate was the rejection of an amendment by Mr. O’Connell, which sought to mandate that emancipated individuals work specifically “for wages” rather than under semi-compulsory terms.

My interpretation: The minority is pro-abolition. The amendment would have

required apprentices to be paid wages for the labor they performed. The minority can therefore be interpreted as pro-abolition, since supporters of the amendment were seeking a fuller form of emancipation.

G.2 June 11 1833 (Briscoe, comp)

Summary: The House of Commons debate on June 11, 1833 centered on the financial terms of abolition, particularly the £20 million compensation to be granted to slave owners. Several amendments were proposed to alter or condition this compensation. Mr. Fowell Buxton suggested tying half of the payment to colonial cooperation; Mr. Wason and Colonel Evans proposed linking compensation to changes in duties on West-Indian produce; and Mr. Briscoe sought to reduce the amount to £15 million—all of which were rejected by large majorities. The original resolution to grant the full £20 million ultimately passed, along with a separate resolution to fund a stipendiary magistracy and moral education for the emancipated population, which incorporated Buxton’s suggestion to emphasize “liberal and comprehensive principles”.

Voting information is only available for two of the divisions.

(i) The NOES on the Original Resolution (The last division).

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. MPs in the minority opposed authorizing Parliament to grant £20 million in compensation. Because compensation was central to the bill, this position may have threatened the prospects of reaching an agreement. The minority is therefore likely to have included radical abolitionists who objected to the compensation deal, but not abolitionists who supported a negotiated bill.

(ii) The AYES on Mr. Briscoe’s Amendment (The fourth division).

My interpretation: the minority is broadly pro-abolition. The amendment aimed to reduce compensation from £20m to £15m, and it was defeated. This division is less informative than others: the proposed change was relatively modest, and some pro-abolition MPs may not have regarded it as important enough to attend or vote on.

G.3 July 24 1833

Summary: The parliamentary debate of July 24, 1833 centered on the abolition of slavery and the contentious apprenticeship system proposed as a transitional measure. While £20 million in compensation to slaveholders was under discussion, much of the debate focused on the moral and practical failures of apprenticeship, which would require formerly enslaved people to work without wages for several years. Critics condemned it as a continuation of slavery, arguing it lacked incentives and fairness, and would not cultivate independence or productivity. Ethical appeals were made for a just and peaceful transition to true freedom. The motion debated—whether the House should resolve into committee to continue work on the Abolition of Slavery Bill—was narrowly passed (158 to 151).

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. Prominent abolitionists, including Thomas Fowell Buxton, appear on the minority list. Their position reflected their desire to reduce the length of the apprenticeship period. In this division, being in the minority is best interpreted as support for emancipation, which by this point had already been negotiated, but with a shorter period of apprenticeship.

G.4 July 25 1833

Summary: The House of Commons considered the government's proposal to end slavery in the British colonies through a transitional apprenticeship system, under which formerly enslaved people would be required to work unpaid for up to six years before receiving full freedom. Abolitionists, led by Mr. Fowell Buxton, opposed this gradual approach, arguing it was an unjust extension of slavery, and proposed an amendment to reduce the apprenticeship period so that full emancipation would occur in 1836 instead of 1840. The government resisted this change, insisting on the longer term to protect colonial economic interests. The resulting division was on Buxton's amendment to shorten the apprenticeship, which was defeated by 206 votes to 89, thereby affirming the government's original plan for a six-year apprenticeship ending in 1840.

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. Prominent abolitionists, including Thomas Fowell Buxton, were on the minority list.

G.5 July 31 1833 (a, b)

First part

Summary: The debate in the House of Commons on July 31, 1833 focused on Clause 25 of the Abolition of Slavery Bill, which proposed granting the Treasury authority to disburse £20 million in compensation to slave owners without further parliamentary approval. Critics such as Mr. Herries, Mr. Aglionby, Mr. O'Connell, and Mr. Cobbett opposed the measure, citing concerns about bypassing parliamentary oversight, the excessive financial burden on taxpayers, and the moral legitimacy of compensating slave owners. Alternative proposals included issuing Exchequer bills or government stock to spread the financial impact. Supporters like Lord Althorp, Mr. Baring, and Sir Robert Peel defended the grant as a necessary fulfillment of parliament's prior commitment and a means to ensure cooperation from colonial legislatures. An amendment to reconsider the grant was rejected, and the clause confirming the £20 million compensation was passed.

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. This division sought to reopen the question of compensation, which had already been settled. Because the amendment challenged the compensation settlement itself, MPs who voted with the minority were attempting to undermine the emancipation bill as negotiated. The minority position is therefore best interpreted as opposition to the compensation deal, most likely from radical abolitionists, rather than from the mainstream abolitionists who would have supported the bill they had negotiated.

Second part

Summary: The July 31, 1833 debate in the House of Commons focused on a proposal to tie half of the £20 million compensation for West-Indian slave owners to the successful completion of the apprenticeship period. Mr. Fowell Buxton supported the motion, arguing that delaying part of the payment would ensure planters fulfilled their obligations, citing distrust based on their past conduct. He proposed holding the funds in trust as a safeguard. Mr. Secretary Stanley opposed the idea, calling it impractical and unfair, while Dr. Lushington agreed on the need for security measures. The amended motion stated that no more than half the compensation should be paid until apprenticeship ended, either by expiration or voluntarily, creating an incentive for planters to end the

system early.

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. Buxton voted with the minority, whose position can be interpreted as an attempt to ensure that emancipation would actually take place.

H Earlier parliamentary votes

H.1 Jamaican slave trials (1 March 1826)

Summary: The March 1, 1826 debate centered on Mr. Denman's motion condemning the unjust trials and executions of eight enslaved individuals in Jamaica in December 1823. Denman argued that the convictions were based on flimsy, coerced, and inconsistent testimony—mainly from a young boy seeking to avoid punishment and from relatives under duress. He detailed specific cases, such as those of James Sterling and Henry Nibbs, to illustrate the lack of fair procedure and credible evidence. The debate criticized colonial authorities, particularly Colonel Cox, for rushing the trials with a predetermined goal of deterrence rather than justice. Denman called on Parliament to address these judicial abuses and implement reforms to ensure fair trials and uphold the rights of the enslaved. The discussion highlighted the broader issue of systemic injustice and the brutal treatment of enslaved people in the colonies.

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. Denman's motion was favorable to enslaved people and would have been supported by MPs who favored amelioration and abolition. Since the motion was defeated, the minority list identifies the MPs who voted for this position.

H.2 Brougham's motion (13 July 1830)

Summary: This was a vote on Brougham's motion to consider the amelioration of conditions for enslaved people, the reform of colonial justice, and the eventual abolition of slavery.

My interpretation: the minority is pro-abolition. The motion was pro-abolition and it failed, meaning that the minority list corresponds to the abolitionist side.

I Summary statistics

Table A1: Summary statistics for the main constituency-level variables

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Owners affected by revolts (log)	192	1.58	1.20	0.00	1.39	6.17
Exposure to revolts (log)	192	1.56	1.19	0.00	1.39	6.12
Sugar ownership, 1823 (log)	192	17.97	6.45	0.00	20.00	24.87
Sugar ownership, 1832 (log)	192	18.02	6.47	0.00	20.01	24.93
Petitions, 1823 (log)	192	0.74	0.69	0.00	0.69	3.43
Petitions, 1832 (log)	192	0.70	0.72	0.00	0.69	3.04
Voters	192	1,446.60	2,251.08	157	698	14,341
Slave owners	192	19.16	60.63	0	5	691
Enslaved people owned by constituency residents	192	6.97	2.92	0.00	7.44	13.38

J Length of colonization

A concern is that owners with enslaved people in older and newer colonies may have been concentrated in different areas of England and Wales. In particular, as the initial colonization of a territory became more distant, the number of British-based owners with no direct connection to these colonies increased, with many of these individuals possibly living farther away from the areas most closely linked to the plantation economy. However, figure A6 shows no correlation between the (weighted) length of time a territory had been a British colony, and the average geographic distance of its owners from England's three main slave-trading ports in London, Bristol and Liverpool.

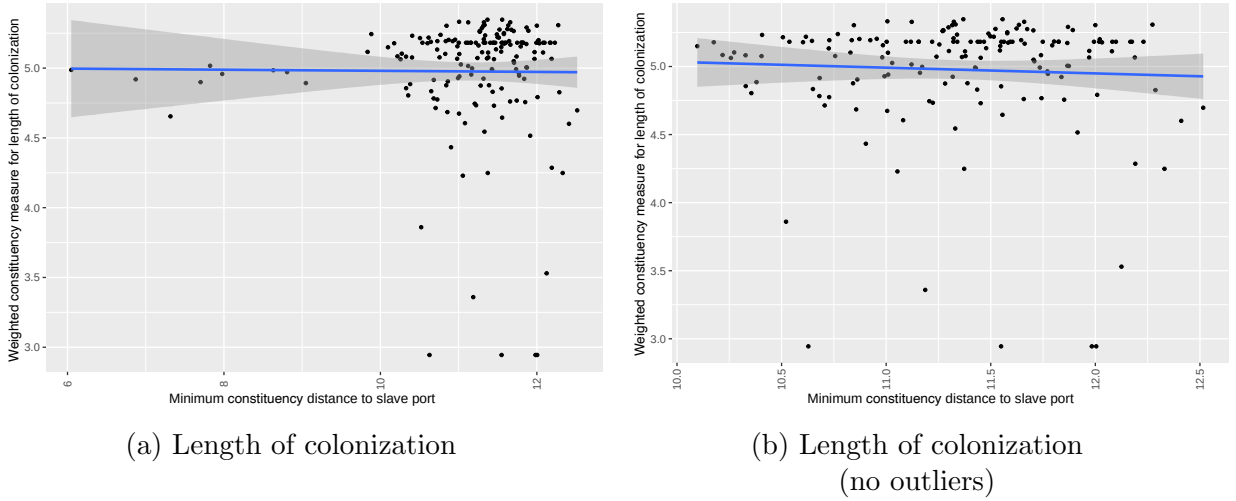


FIGURE A6: The horizontal axes show the minimum distance from each constituency to one of England's three main slave-trading ports: London, Bristol, or Liverpool. The vertical axes show the average length of time that the colonies in each constituency's portfolio had been part of the British Empire, weighted by the share of enslaved people they held in each colony.

K Alternative codings of the dependent variable

Table A2: Robustness to alternative codings of the dependent variable

Outcome variable Model:	Votes _i (binary)			
	Clearly pro-abolition (1)	(2)	July only (3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners affected _i	0.1762* (0.0699)		0.1662* (0.0689)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1798** (0.0687)		0.1639* (0.0677)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0097 (0.0094)	-0.0099 (0.0094)	-0.0093 (0.0094)	-0.0091 (0.0094)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0070 (0.0712)	0.0066 (0.0709)	0.0173 (0.0711)	0.0183 (0.0708)
owners _i	-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0012 (0.0009)	-0.0011 (0.0009)	-0.0011 (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.2056+ (0.1135)	0.2083+ (0.1133)	0.1913 (0.1156)	0.1930+ (0.1158)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1351 (0.1619)	-0.1365 (0.1611)	-0.1260 (0.1581)	-0.1257 (0.1577)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	192	192
R ²	0.31565	0.31750	0.32383	0.32349
Within R ²	0.06880	0.07132	0.06303	0.06256

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. In the clearly pro-abolition columns, *Votes_i (binary)* is constructed using the votes for which the minority list can be clearly identified as supporting compensated emancipation: June 10, July 24, July 25, and the second vote on July 31, 1833, labeled (b). In the July only column, the variable is constructed using only the July votes, by which point the main elements of the bill had been agreed. The rest of the variables are defined in the notes to table 3.

L The instrumental variable estimation

L.1 More on the exclusion restriction

One concern is that the mortality among enslaved people may have been higher in more fractionalized societies, perhaps because fractionalization weakened informal insurance mechanisms. Higher mortality could, in turn, have affected the emancipation vote through its effect on output. To address this possibility, figure A7 reports colony-level mortality rates in 1822-23, using data from Higman (1984). Jamaica, the colony with the largest number of revolts, had relatively low mortality during this period. In addition, simple cross-colony regressions show no correlation between fractionalization and mortality, and no correlation between mortality and slave revolts (results not shown).

One concern is that fractionalization could have been a deliberate policy: planters assembled a diverse group of enslaved people in order to prevent slave revolts. There is nothing in the historical accounts to suggest that this was the case. Although there was some understanding of where the enslaved people came from, a “fractionalization strategy” would have required a colony-wide policy of purchasing enslaved people from a variety of backgrounds. I have found no reference to such a strategy, and it is difficult to think how the coordination problem would have been solved. Instead, it appears that slave traders bought enslaved people wherever they could in Africa, and took them to wherever there was demand for them. Planters bought enslaved people on the basis of price as well as age, gender and apparent health.

Finally, note that in the data, fractionalization ranges from 0.55 in Dominica (the least fractionalized colony) to 0.80 in Antigua (the most fractionalized colony), with the median at 0.76. Because the data distinguish nine African regions of embarkation, a deliberate strategy of fractionalization would imply roughly equal representation from each region. If each region accounted for one-ninth of enslaved arrivals, the resulting fractionalization value would be $(1 - 9(1/9)^2 = 0.89)$.

L.2 Correlation between fractionalization and slave revolts

Figure A8 shows the correlation between fractionalization and slave revolts. Fractionalization is measured using all arrivals between 1700 and 1807, the year the British slave

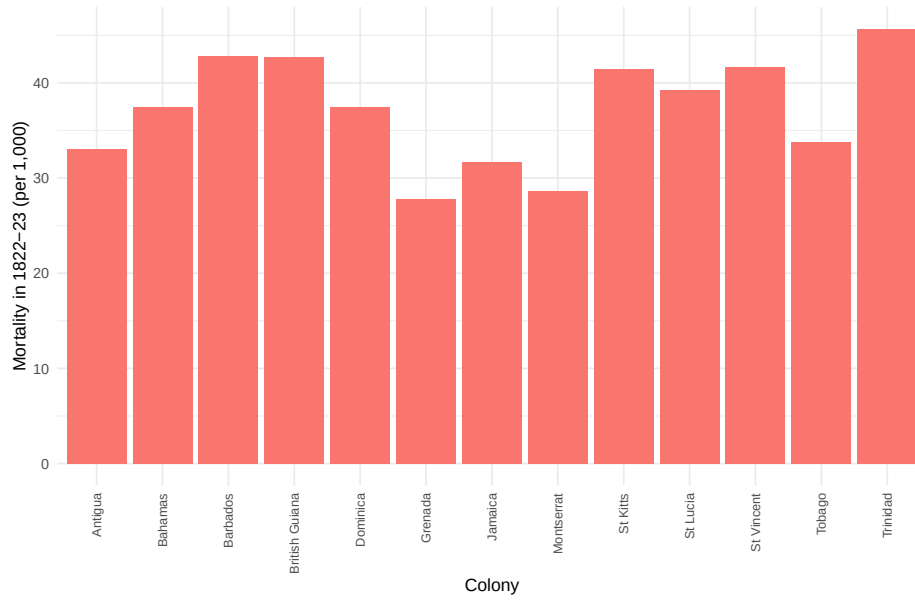


FIGURE A7: Mortality of enslaved people in 1822-23 (per 1,000 individuals), constructed using the data in Table 9.1 in Higman (1984).

trade was abolished. The revolt measure includes only revolts that took place between 1807 and 1833. Both panels show a negative relationship between fractionalization and revolts. Although the small number of observations makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions, the coefficient from a regression of revolts on fractionalization is not statistically significant when revolts of all sizes are included. However, it is significant at the 10 percent level when the measure is restricted to large revolts, defined as those involving thousands or many thousands of participants. In that specification, the coefficient is -11.25 and the p -value is 0.067.

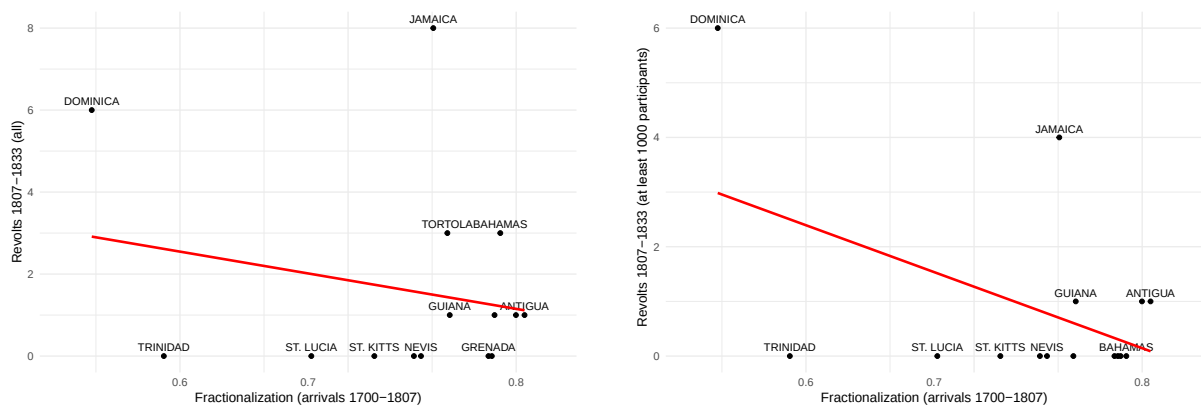


FIGURE A8: The relationship between fractionalization (1700-1807) and slave revolts (1807-1833). Large slave revolts are those Craton (1982b) classified as having thousands or many thousands of participants.

L.3 The reduced form

Table A3: IV estimates: reduced form

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary) (1)
<i>Variables</i>	
fractionalization _i	-1.230 ⁺ (0.7333)
ln enslaved in colonies _i	0.1208** (0.0449)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0399 ⁺ (0.0236)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0322 (0.0681)
owners _i	-0.0006 (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1777 (0.1178)
MP slave owner _i	-0.0648 (0.1601)
<i>Dummies</i>	
county	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>	
Observations	192
R ²	0.31880
Within R ²	0.06218

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ⁺ p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. The fractionalization IV is defined in equation (4). The rest of the variables are defined in the notes to table 3.

M Additional information on Jamaica

Table A4: Jamaican slave prices over time

Dependent Variable:	slave prices _t
Model:	(1)
<i>Variables</i>	
t	0.0014 ⁺ (0.0008)
post-revolt _t	43.08 (33.94)
t × post-revolt _t	-0.0115* (0.0053)
<i>Fit statistics</i>	
Observations	60
R ²	0.64678
Adjusted R ²	0.62786

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. *slave prices_t* is the average price of an enslaved person in Jamaica in time period *t* (there are three time periods per year). *t* indexes time, with three observations per year. *post-revolt_t* is a dummy that equals 1 if period *t* is after the start of the Argyle war revolt in Jamaica; the first value of *t* for which the dummy equals 1 corresponds to October 1823.

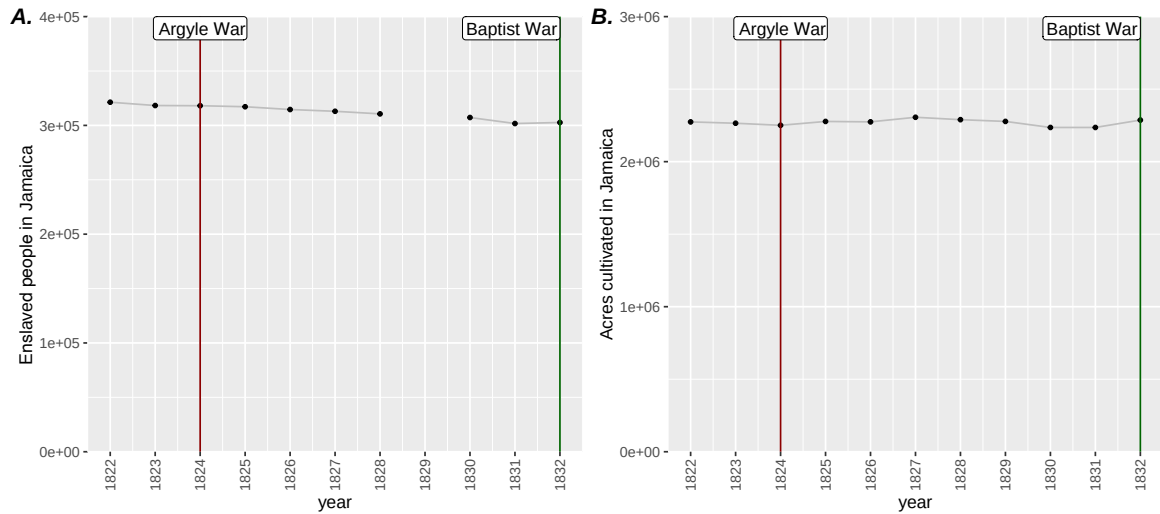


FIGURE A9: Enslaved people and acres cultivated in Jamaica

Table A5: Regressions where the sample of owners is restricted to those who held enslaved people in the ten Jamaican parishes with the largest enslaved populations. Slave owners with enslaved people in parishes affected by the Baptist War revolt (Hanover, St James, Trelawny, or Westmoreland) are considered to be affected and exposed. Slave owners with enslaved people in the other six parishes are considered unaffected and unexposed. Slave owners with no enslaved people in these ten parishes are not included.

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i (affected Jamaican parishes)	0.1887** (0.0721)	
ln owners' exposure _i (affected Jamaican parishes)		0.1946* (0.0755)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0036 (0.0085)	-0.0034 (0.0085)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0281 (0.0674)	0.0290 (0.0681)
owners Jamaica _i (largest 10 parishes)	-0.0037 (0.0028)	-0.0037 (0.0028)
new constituency _i	0.1637 (0.1183)	0.1566 (0.1191)
MP owned slaves _i	-0.1041 (0.1669)	-0.1147 (0.1675)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
R ²	0.32048	0.31892
Within R ²	0.06449	0.06234
Sample	const with owners of enslaved people 10 largest parishes	const with owners of enslaved people 10 largest parishes

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *ln owners affected_i (affected Jamaican parishes)* is the log number of owners in constituency *i* who held enslaved people in the Jamaican parishes affected by the Baptist War revolt of 1831-32: Hanover, St James, Trelawny, Westmoreland. *ln owners' exposure_i (affected Jamaican parishes)* is the exposure equivalent to the affected-owners measure. Enslaved people are classified as unexposed if they were held in any of the other six of Jamaica's ten largest slaveholding parishes. *owners Jamaica_i (largest 10 parishes)* is the number of owners in constituency *i* who held enslaved people in the ten Jamaican parishes with the largest enslaved populations. All other variables are as defined in table 3.

N Pledges

Table A6 shows that controlling for whether a pledged candidate ran or won in the 1832 election makes the coefficients on exposure larger and more statistically significant. This is likely because these variables control for unobserved constituency-level characteristics.

Table A6: Control for whether a pledged candidate ran in the 1832 election, or whether a pledged candidate won in the 1832 election (by constituency)

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners affected _i	0.2111** (0.0662)		0.2620** (0.0847)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.2139** (0.0650)		0.2705** (0.0858)
pledged candidate in <i>i</i>	0.2778** (0.1013)	0.2779** (0.1012)		
pledged candidate won in <i>i</i>			0.5438*** (0.1425)	0.5452*** (0.1422)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0137 (0.0092)	-0.0138 (0.0091)	-0.0358** (0.0123)	-0.0365** (0.0123)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0324 (0.0710)	-0.0324 (0.0705)	-0.0461 (0.0986)	-0.0469 (0.0975)
owners _i	-0.0016* (0.0008)	-0.0016* (0.0008)	-0.0013* (0.0006)	-0.0014* (0.0006)
new constituency _i	0.1122 (0.1181)	0.1152 (0.1180)	0.2044 (0.1359)	0.2085 (0.1348)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1341 (0.1424)	-0.1354 (0.1417)	0.0399 (0.1478)	0.0325 (0.1475)
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	81	81
R ²	0.36602	0.36801	0.65169	0.65733
Within R ²	0.12718	0.12993	0.42480	0.43411
Sample	all const	all const	const with pledged candidate(s)	const with pledged candidate(s)

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *pledged candidate in i* is a dummy that equals 1 if a pledged candidate ran in constituency *i* in the 1832 election. *pledged candidate won in i* is a dummy that equals 1 if a pledged candidate won in constituency *i* in the 1832 election. All other variables are as defined in the notes to table 3.

O Robustness

Table A7: Controlling for local population and the number of enslaved people

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners affected _i	0.1776** (0.0649)	0.1137+ (0.0620)		
ln owners' exposure _i			0.1807** (0.0638)	0.1169+ (0.0612)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0099 (0.0093)	-0.0062 (0.0090)	-0.0101 (0.0093)	-0.0065 (0.0090)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0021 (0.0713)	-0.0563 (0.0775)	0.0018 (0.0710)	-0.0561 (0.0773)
new constituency _i	0.1716 (0.1145)	0.0469 (0.1248)	0.1742 (0.1143)	0.0499 (0.1249)
MP owned slaves _i	-0.1113 (0.1582)	-0.0905 (0.1565)	-0.1128 (0.1575)	-0.0921 (0.1562)
enslaved people _i	-1.17×10^{-6} (1.06×10^{-6})		-1.17×10^{-6} (1.06×10^{-6})	
population _{i,1823}		$4.57 \times 10^{-6**}$ (1.68×10^{-6})		$4.52 \times 10^{-6**}$ (1.69×10^{-6})
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	192	192	192	192
R ²	0.32281	0.34031	0.32464	0.34138
Within R ²	0.06770	0.09180	0.07022	0.09326

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. *enslaved people_i* is the total number of enslaved people owned by individuals in constituency *i* and *population_{i,1823}* is the population of constituency *i* in 1823. All other variables are as defined in the notes to table 3.

Table A8: Sample includes borough and county constituencies of England and Wales.

Dependent Variable:	Votes _i (binary)	
Model:	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i	0.1666*** (0.0497)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1695*** (0.0495)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0098 (0.0084)	-0.0101 (0.0084)
owners _i	-0.0002 (0.0007)	-0.0002 (0.0007)
new constituency _i	0.1427 (0.1030)	0.1456 (0.1027)
MP owned slaves _i	-0.0826 (0.1284)	-0.0834 (0.1281)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	242	242
R ²	0.28160	0.28344
Within R ²	0.07426	0.07663

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables are as defined in table 3.

Table A9: Drop (i) London, (ii) Bristol and Liverpool

Dependent Variable:	Votes _i (binary)			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Variables</i>				
ln owners affected _i	0.1366 (0.0871)		0.1845** (0.0704)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1420+ (0.0853)		0.1868** (0.0693)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0079 (0.0097)	-0.0082 (0.0097)	-0.0105 (0.0094)	-0.0106 (0.0094)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	-0.0082 (0.0751)	-0.0083 (0.0750)	0.0211 (0.0747)	0.0207 (0.0746)
owners _i	0.0014 (0.0022)	0.0013 (0.0022)	-0.0010 (0.0009)	-0.0010 (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1518 (0.1166)	0.1545 (0.1166)	0.1698 (0.1167)	0.1724 (0.1166)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1350 (0.1648)	-0.1357 (0.1641)	-0.0543 (0.1651)	-0.0570 (0.1647)
<i>Dummies</i>				
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	188	188	190	190
R ²	0.32804	0.32950	0.32450	0.32592
Within R ²	0.07299	0.07501	0.06807	0.07003
Sample	excludes London	excludes London	excludes Bristol and Liverpool	excludes Bristol and Liverpool

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Variables are as defined in the notes to table 3.

Table A10: Restricting owners to those with large holdings, defined by compensation awards of at least £500

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i	0.1757* (0.0733)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1767* (0.0726)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0092 (0.0095)	-0.0092 (0.0095)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0042 (0.0723)	0.0048 (0.0720)
owners _i	-0.0011 (0.0009)	-0.0011 (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1696 (0.1144)	0.1709 (0.1145)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1150 (0.1629)	-0.1153 (0.1623)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
R ²	0.31727	0.31770
Within R ²	0.06007	0.06067
Sample	compensation ≥ £500 compensation ≥ £500	

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables are as defined in table 3.

Table A11: Restricting owners to those with small holdings, defined by compensation awards below £500

Dependent Variable: Model:	Votes _i (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i	0.2453** (0.0798)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.2556** (0.0785)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0053 (0.0062)	-0.0058 (0.0061)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0083 (0.0682)	0.0071 (0.0680)
owners _i	-0.0016+ (0.0009)	-0.0017+ (0.0009)
new constituency _i	0.1755 (0.1137)	0.1792 (0.1133)
MP slave owner _i	-0.0223 (0.1594)	-0.0222 (0.1589)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
R ²	0.33173	0.33554
Within R ²	0.07998	0.08522
Sample	compensation < £500 compensation < £500	

Notes: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables are as defined in table 3.

Table A12: Include only claims that were eventually successful

Dependent Variable:	Votes _i (binary)	
Model:	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ln owners affected _i	0.1800* (0.0735)	
ln owners' exposure _i		0.1791* (0.0719)
ln sugar exports _{i,1823}	-0.0080 (0.0084)	-0.0079 (0.0084)
ln petitions _{i,1823}	0.0068 (0.0700)	0.0071 (0.0699)
owners _i	-0.0014 (0.0011)	-0.0014 (0.0011)
new constituency _i	0.1774 (0.1152)	0.1796 (0.1152)
MP slave owner _i	-0.1133 (0.1615)	-0.1133 (0.1605)
<i>Dummies</i>		
county	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	192	192
R ²	0.31709	0.31773
Within R ²	0.05983	0.06071
Sample	only successful claims only successful claims	

Notes: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables are as defined in table 3.