Hoarse Throats and Sore Heads: Popular Participation in Parliamentary Elections Before Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France

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The political history of regimes with limited suffrage has been written without too much reference to those who were unable to vote, save for when they protested or rebelled. Yet the social history of elections in these circumstances suggests that such people were key agents in the electoral process, albeit at the price of hoarse throats through shouting and singing, or sore heads as a result of consuming too much alcohol. Thanks to recent research, this kind of popular engagement has become more visible in Britain, where a limited male franchise endured for the whole of the nineteenth century.[1] It was only after 1884 that a majority (about two-thirds) of adult males possessed the suffrage, and not until 1918 when they were all enfranchised (while only in 1928 were all adult women placed on a similar footing). The subject has attracted less attention in France, where historians and political scientists have generally neglected elections under the constitutional monarchies that maintained a highly restricted suffrage between 1814 and 1848.[2] Instead, their attention has focused on the more democratic republican regimes that preceded and succeeded them and, not least, on the elections under direct universal male suffrage that prevailed after 1848 (though in France women were not enfranchised until 1944).

      This chapter sheds some much needed light on the involvement of non-electors in France during the time of the Bourbon Restoration, 1814-1830 and the July Monarchy, 1830-1848, while comparing it with the culture of popular participation that flourished in the better-known case of nineteenth-century Britain. The details of electoral culture certainly differed in terms of the spatial organization of voting and the methods used to determine victors; and of the two countries, Britain was home to the most elaborate and inclusive electoral rituals. Equally, there are also some striking similarities in the involvement and mobilisation of those without the right to vote. These similarities, which allow for a productive reconsideration of how electoral legitimacy and elite authority were managed and challenged, in ways that were popular if not of course democratic, are the subject of attention here. We begin with a brief overview of the development of the franchise in each country and how elections were staged, before considering the involvement of non-electors and assessing its significance.

The Franchise and the Spatial Organisation of Elections

The French, of course, had conducted an unprecedented experiment with a mass suffrage after 1789.[3] This experience exerted a considerable influence during the next century, although the end of the Napoleonic episode (when elections survived but were carefully managed) brought a drastic reduction of the franchise under the restored Bourbon monarchy that immediately followed. After 1814, not only were elections confined to the parliamentary level – all other posts were simply appointed – but fewer than 100,000 wealthy, male property owners were able to vote. However, unlike the indirect elections of the preceding decades, this small electorate directly elected members of a Chamber of Deputies, doing so at a single assembly in a process which could last up to a week and at the very least two days. Crucially, these 'electoral colleges' met in the chief town of each department – and, after 1830, the chief towns of the 400 or so *arrondissements* (electoral subdivisions of the departments) – and were normally located in a town hall or courthouse.

In this way, by locating the process of election in a series of central civic locations throughout the country, French practices began to converge with those in Britain. Since the late seventeenth century, when contested elections became more common, the 'hustings' (an ancient term, still in use today) had offered a single, open-air electoral assembly for the 300 or so parliamentary 'constituencies' which returned MPs to the House of Commons (most of them two MPs).[4] Normally situated in a place of civic importance, such as a marketplace or town square, the hustings provided the central stage where speeches were delivered, votes administered, and interim and final vote tallies declared. To be sure, Britain boasted a broader electorate than France. This was true in the decades before the Reform Act of 1832, which extended the franchise to some 700,000 voters, whereas during the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe, the French electorate merely increased to 250,000.[5] Nonetheless, in both cases, only a tiny minority of adult males exercised the suffrage. In Britain, this amounted to roughly 3 per cent of the total population prior to 1832 (1 in 7 adult males); and about 5 per cent afterwards (1 in 5 adult males). In France, even after 1830, the equivalent figure is less than 1 per cent of the population (or 1 in 50 adult males).

In both countries electors were also called to vote on a regular basis, following the dissolution of a sitting parliament. Between 1815 and 1848 some twelve general elections were held in France and ten in Britain. In the latter, however, not all seats were contested and put to a poll. In Britain, when parliamentary elections were called, the voters in an urban borough (those towns which elected MPs), or rural shire (every county returned representatives), were summoned to assemble, and a rough poll was taken by a show of hands to indicate levels of support for the competing candidates.[6] These initial 'nomination meetings', as they were sometimes called, dated back centuries and were normally held at the hustings. If one or more of the candidates concluded that they had no chance of winning, they would withdraw, and the remaining candidate(s) would be elected unopposed, without a formal vote. However, if the poll went ahead, then voting began at the hustings, in temporary structures known as 'polling booths', with electors communicating their preferences orally to a

local official, who recorded it, together with their name, in a register called a 'poll book', a practice that dated back to 1696. This information was subsequently available for public inspection and it was usually published, so the vote was not at all secret. Then, as now, a single ballot majority system – 'first past the post' – determined the result, and during the period under consideration here the number of contested elections slowly, if unevenly, increased. From the 1780s contests became much more common in populous boroughs, and between the 1820s and the 1860s contests took place, on average, in roughly half the constituencies.

In France, by contrast, there were no formally declared candidatures, building on a practice that was confirmed during the revolutionary decade. Instead, elections always took place, even when the outcome was a foregone conclusion. The process of nomination, which was distinct in Britain, was simply part of the electoral college procedure, which mixed selecting candidates with finding an eventual victor.[7] Enacted within the confines of an assembly, the vote was also, in theory, secret (although in practice individual electors were more or less discrete). Each voter wrote down his choice on a piece of paper – the *bulletin* – which had been distributed by assembly officials. He then folded the paper and returned it for insertion into a ballot box or *urne*. Unlike the British, the French relied on a method of exhaustive balloting, with up to three rounds of voting in search of a candidate with an absolute majority. To secure election, 50 per cent plus one of the valid votes cast was required at the first or second round, before there was a run-off between the two leading contenders at the third. Furthermore – and again, unlike in Britain, where votes were cast as part of an open, public assembly – access to the French assembly was restricted to card-carrying electors.[8] In debating the validity of an election in 1831, one contributor emphasized that there should be no communication with the outside world, otherwise the electors' consciences would be disturbed and the outcome would be distorted. The result was that the electoral process was invariably conducted in an orderly fashion and those present were able to scrutinize the proceedings, from the casting of ballot papers to their counting by officials.

In this respect, the French drew clearer lines of exclusion around the process of casting a vote compared to the British. The space outside these assemblies was a different matter, however. Like their unenfranchised counterparts across the Channel, French non-electors crowded around the polling venue, mingling with the electors as they arrived to deliver their votes and after they left the assembly. As we shall see, they indulged in similar forms of behaviour that were by turns ritualized and deferential, subversive and violent. Parallels indeed were drawn at the time. As one French voter put it, referring to the pressure exerted over electors outside the assemblies and the rowdy atmosphere that prevailed in the town that was hosting the election, 'when you adopt another country's system (Britain's limited monarchy), you also assume their culture'.[9] The situation provoked especially critical comment from conservatives. Opposing the institutional framework 'imported' from Britain, they thought the restored monarchy should have reverted to the electoral traditions of the *ancien régime*, which restricted such practices to an intricate, hierarchical patchwork of co-opting corporate bodies. Long accustomed to an unruly, public culture of elections, the British, by contrast, were more inclined to emphasize their differences

with the French, and they were especially curious about the use of ballot papers during the 1830s and 1840s.[10] Yet, in the context of the nineteenth century, and arguably in the context of the twentieth too, the period between 1815 and 1848 represents a unique moment when their electoral cultures had more common than not. We turn now to the key features of each as they relate to the role of the unenfranchised.

Popular Electoral Participation

In Britain popular involvement was a long-established aspect of an elaborate, highly ritualized election process. This was subject to some reform during the period under consideration here, notably in relation to the overall length of polling, which was gradually curtailed from a maximum of fifteen days to just one, first in boroughs in 1835 and then in counties in 1853. Nonetheless, as Frank O'Gorman has argued, this very public culture of elections enjoyed its greatest currency and fullest expression from around 1780 until the 1840s, when it began to decline.[11] Even if a formal poll did not take place, there was a public vote (or nomination) to determine whether or not an election should go ahead, and this procedure was open to all members of the community, not just the electors, who voted by acclamation. Indeed, candidates always circulated an address, which was widely publicized in the press, flyers and on posters, declaring to both electors and non-electors that they intended to stand, thus creating a communal dimension from the outset. This was followed by the 'public entries' made by the candidates into the constituency, which were designed to demonstrate their popularity. The processions were advertised in advance, and supporters were put in marching order, wearing different colours and waving banners. In county elections, participants paraded into town, whereas in borough elections, they went from the town to meet the candidate's carriage just beyond the urban boundaries. Very often the horses would be unshackled and supporters would then pull the conveyance into town themselves, with a band playing well-known tunes alongside them.

The numbers involved were often considerable. At the county town of Norwich in 1830 the carriage of one of the candidates was reportedly greeted by more than 15,000 people.[12] A description of the entry of John Fielden and General Johnson into the Lancashire factory town of Oldham at the general election of 1847 conveys the sense of anticipation that attended these truly communal events:

> Long before the appointed hour, large masses of people flocked to the spot; each vying with his fellow to have the honour of offering a hearty welcome … Every available position from which a glimpse of the road could be obtained was thronged to excess, every window had its full complement of occupants, and the tops of houses contributed largely to the assembled multitude.[13]

It was said that more than 18,000 people were present on this occasion (the town's population in the census of 1851 was 52,000), while the procession was a mile long and comprised eight musical bands.

At Blackburn, another northern industrial town, some 15 to 20,000 people attended the process of nomination in 1832, at a time when there were just 30,000 inhabitants.[14] However, before this stage was reached there was a 'canvass', when the newly arrived candidates sought support, either by visiting houses or holding mass meetings, which any member of the public was entitled to attend, elector or not. All parties struggled hard to get the sympathy of the masses. The nomination itself took place at the raised hustings and as each candidate appeared on the platform he was booed or cheered by different sections of the audience, who would heckle and chant against one another. A lack of sympathy might persuade an evidently less popular candidate to withdraw from the contest.

Significantly, women were also included in these initial acts of the electoral ritual and not simply in their role as candidates' wives. They also participated in the open haranguing of candidates and their agents. At Oldham again, in 1837 this time, one of the Conservative canvassers was 'assailed … by the hootings and hissings of a group of female radicals.'[15] If the formal poll subsequently went ahead, then the process of voting offered another opportunity for the unenfranchised to have their say. Crowds of them gathered around the polling booths at the hustings, not simply to monitor and influence the voters, but also to trade insults and amuse themselves. At Boston, in eastern England, in 1831, one elector waved his hat in defiance at the abuse he was enduring, but he was then knocked down and beaten as a result. Violence of this sort was relatively rare, as opposed to altercations between rival supporters; but it was the voting procedure that was the great leveller. Those who exercised the franchise, generally the better off, were obliged to take advice and suffer offensive remarks as a reminder that they were acting on behalf of the community as a whole.

Electoral involvement on the part of non-voters was equally evident in France, although, as noted above, it was restricted to the public space beyond the buildings where the wealthy electors met. Popular disturbances had accompanied the elections of 1815 and 1818 in the confessionally divided department of the Gard, when Catholic and Protestant crowds had clashed on the streets of Nîmes, as attempts were made to dissuade Protestant electors from voting.[16] In this case it was ultra-royalists rather than liberals who had organized the intervention, but it was the latter who generally took the initiative after the government decided to modify the electoral system because they were winning too many seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In 1820, the so-called 'double vote' was introduced, which gave the most-wealthy electors a second vote, which they could exercise at the departmental electoral colleges, before joining the majority of the electorate in newly created *arrondissement* colleges, where most deputies were elected. This law, however, was widely resented and, as a result, during the 1820s, popular electoral participation became much more pronounced.

When the first general election had been held using the 'double vote' in 1824, local officials expressed their concern that agitation was occurring at many polling places and it was being claimed that deputies were 'representatives of the people'.[17] A more reactionary Charles X had come to the throne, keen to force the pace of illiberal reform, but he found himself facing determined parliamentary opposition. Goaded into calling fresh elections in 1827, in the hope of obtaining a more compliant Chamber, he only provoked still more popular resistance, which would reach a

crescendo when further elections were called three years later. Liberals were by no means advocates of universal male suffrage, but their electoral campaigns stimulated ordinary people to become more involved. At Perpignan, in 1827, after a victory for conservative royalists had been announced at the electoral college of the Pyrénées-Orientales, local residents turned out to verbally abuse the electors as they made their way back to the places where they were staying, shouting 'Down with the ministerial candidates' and 'Down with the Jesuits' (a reference to the government's religious policies which sought to revive the authority of the Catholic Church).[18] There were similar 'seditious chants' in the Côte-d'Or, at Beaune, and tricolour cockades, banned since 1814, when they were replaced by white, Bourbon favours, were also in evidence.[19]

In the summer of 1830, when parliament was once more prematurely dissolved, popular rejoicing at the outcome of the ensuing elections was widespread. In the Seine-et-Marne an *arc de triomphe* was erected for the newly re-elected Lafayette (a hero of the Revolution of 1789) to ride through, along with his triumphal cavalcade.[20] These mounted processions were escorted by hundreds of people on foot, crying 'Vive la Charte' (the Bourbon constitutional Charter of 1814), and 'Vive nos institutions'. There were also firework displays and public banquets which attracted large crowds, at which inflammatory speeches were made. Windows were decorated and illuminated, and music was played by bands parading through the streets. These celebrations involved all types of inhabitant, women as well as men, especially younger males, for French voters had to be over thirty-years-old. The Côte-d'Or, in Burgundy, was an especially agitated department and, in the *arrondissement* of Beaune, a large 'transparency' was strung across the main street, with 'Long live the Charter' emblazoned on it in huge letters.[21] Such popular participation was the prelude to the July Revolution of 1830, which was prompted by Charles X's authoritarian response to electoral defeat, but the political changes which followed were relatively modest.

Under the subsequent Orleanist regime, the involvement of non-voters accordingly increased, as candidates adopted public meetings and British-style hustings to promote their cause in many of the 450 *arrondissement* constituencies that were reconfigured after the double vote had been scrapped and departmental electoral colleges abandoned. Demands to reform the modified Charter of 1830 took the place of efforts to defend its predecessor, notably to further extend the franchise. To judge by reports in the press, popular reactions to election results, whether of condemnation or celebration, via charivari or serenade, became commonplace. Once they had left their closed assemblies, electors were obliged to run the gauntlet of large crowds and an unpopular outcome could provoke some nasty consequences. At Montpellier, while the result was being decided for the elections of 1846, a gathering crowd threatened to seize a ballot box which was being taken from one section of an assembly to another. The National Guard was summoned to prevent his happening, only to be met with a hail of stones, while voters were booed and some of them were knocked over as they made their way home.[22] At Châteaubriant, in the Loire-Inférieure also in 1846, a worse fate was threatened when two prominent royalists were set upon and chased by protesters. Only the timely intervention of the police secured their safety.[23]

Celebrations were equally boisterous and occasionally overwhelming. At Toulon, in 1831, a newly elected patriotic deputy was accompanied to his residence by a crowd of some 600 people, serenaded by the band of the National Guard, and he responded with an impromptu speech from the balcony. The band then marched around the town singing the *Marseillaise*.[24] Three years later, at Carcassonne in the Languedoc, electors dropped notes from the windows of the *hôtel de ville* where they were meeting to inform the waiting crowd below that a liberal victory was imminent.[25] This was the signal for fireworks and loud music which continued for the rest of the evening, while bonfires lit on top of hills surrounding the town announced the glad tidings to neighbouring communities. Such popular enthusiasm was not always welcomed by the successful candidate: at Castelnaudary (Aude), in 1846, the crowd was keen to carry him aloft around the town, but he took refuge at the *sous-préfecture*, whence he was obliged to emerge and acknowledge his over-exuberant supporters.[26]

In Britain, meanwhile, the declaration of results announced the final act of the nineteenth-century election ritual, which prompted scenes of public rejoicing or anger, just like those witnessed across the Channel in France. Yet it was a specifically British tradition that both victorious and defeated candidates should address the assembled populace, who could voice their approval or dismay at the outcome. Moreover, the procedure traditionally concluded with the 'chairing' of the victor, when the newly elected MP would be raised up and paraded around the town in the midst of a raucous mass, which usually numbered thousands of people.[27] The chairs themselves were elaborately decorated with flags and flowers, to symbolize the victor taking his seat in parliament. The procession was intended to create communal consensus in the wake of electoral conflict, yet this custom, as with all elements of the electoral process, could be subverted. Perched precariously above the crowd, the winning candidate would be reminded how easily he might be toppled from power. Indeed, supporters of the defeated candidate might manifest their disappointment by hanging black cloth from their windows, pulling down their shutters and closing shops as the chairing party went past, or simply by throwing missiles at the chair.

Elections certainly generated a good deal of unruliness, lubricated by 'treating' and the offer of abundant liquid hospitality to voters, which was also enjoyed by non-electors in France as well as Britain. The excess might be considerable even before a poll had begun. The contest at the small Sussex town of Horsham in 1847 was reportedly preceded by six weeks of open revelry, with the rival parties offering voters and non-voters alike evening entertainments known as 'Pink goes' and 'Blue goes', where free beer was on offer.[28] Indeed, the carnival atmosphere, which always emerged as supporters of the candidates effectively took control of the town where polling took place, could easily become violent, as jostling and heckling turned into fighting between rival groups, with damage to property occurring as a consequence. The radical candidate at Blackburn, in 1832, began his public address by displaying a large stone which had been thrown through the window of his hotel room and missed his head by a few centimetres. In some cases, intimidation was quite deliberately organized: when partisans of one candidate came to canvass in Kendal (in north-western England) in 1818, they were met by more than 100 horsemen who attacked

their carriages and broke them to pieces. The absence of adequate policing could lead to the hiring of vigilantes to maintain order: in 1826, at East Retford, in the British Midlands, a mob was hired to physically prevent one candidate's supporters from arriving at the hustings.[29]

Unsurprisingly, given its unruly character, there was much criticism of popular electoral participation. Members of the elite on both sides of the Channel found this encounter with ordinary people profoundly distasteful, if not alarming. Their reaction was graphically expressed in a French newspaper article published in the south-western department of the Haute-Vienne in November 1827, commenting on the elections there, where locals had resorted to a charivari to express their disapproval:

> We have just witnessed the calm atmosphere at the electoral assembly [in Limoges] ruined by popular disturbances in the town. Why have uncouth individuals, wholly lacking in education, and without any sense of morality, decided to involve themselves in matters which they cannot understand? They come out in the evening with their musical instruments and saucepans in order to make a din, at the prefecture and under the windows of those elected. Do they have political rights recognized by the Charter? Of course not, these are men who have been deceived and worked up, perhaps paid to show up … Festivals are designed for the people, but matters of state are beyond its grasp … Let us implore the Almighty to preserve us for another seven years [the parliamentary term] from the fever of elections, a dreadful malady which stirs up emotions, breaks up friendships, divides families and destroys civility …[30]

There was no shortage of criticism in Britain, too. That civic authorities routinely expressed relief when it was decided not to proceed to a poll suggests a widespread sense of unease, which seems to have principally attached to the violence a contest entailed. But criticism intensified from the 1820s, as electoral reform became more of a mainstream ambition. As one pro-reform pamphlet argued in 1833, advocating the end of open voting, 'the tumult and confusion, the riot and intemperance, the drunkenness, debauchery and intimidation that attended contested elections' degraded not just voters and their ability to exercise their rights independently, but the entire community.[31]

Yet, in both countries, the dominant response was one of toleration rather condemnation and it would not be until mid-century in France, and still later in Britain, when any substantive reforms were introduced that significantly cracked down on this culture and reshaped the process of voting. We return to these reforms in the conclusion; but first we attempt to make sense of these sorts of popular involvement and the kind and degree of empowerment they afforded.

The Significance and Limitations of Popular Involvement

Assessing the significance of these forms of involvement, however, is no easy task. They clearly need to be taken seriously and we should avoid the tendency of an older generation of historians to dismiss them as mere exuberance on the part of the masses. For all the widespread misgivings about the immorality and violent excess they entailed, these forms of participation were evidently seen by all classes of society as

legitimate and meaningful. Yet we should also be wary of granting these forms too much significance in terms of the power and agency they afforded to non-electors. Demotic they may have been, but – to make an obvious if crucial point – they were not democratic. Indeed, just as much as the electoral culture of each country permitted, and even encouraged, expressions of plebeian hostility toward the elites and the enfranchised, so too did it channel this hostility in ways that, ultimately, left existing power relations and formal exclusions intact. We should, then, proceed cautiously, but this by no means precludes offering some general comparative observations about the significance of popular involvement.

The first point is simply that the participation of non-electors was considered vital in some respects. In both countries, elections were part of a broader culture of civic display and pageantry, reaching back centuries, that was designed to project social hierarchy and institutional authority. The examples are many, among them the ceremonial processions that opened provincial meetings of the higher courts (for example, the British Assizes), or those that accompanied national days of celebration (such as the coronation of a new monarch).[32] These were nothing without a popular audience and it is clear that elections, which comprised their own ritualized processions of course, were governed by a similar social and symbolic rationale. In the case of elections, however, this was supplemented – and greatly complicated – by a more straightforwardly political rationale: a sense of public accountability toward those both with and without the vote. Far from contradicting the commitment to a highly exclusive franchise, this was, in many respects, its natural accompaniment. It is not just that elections invariably raised questions that implicated the whole of the community and the dense fabric of relations and obligations between classes. The very logic of limited suffrage placed a premium on publicity by rendering the vote something that was, in theory at least, exercised on behalf of others.[33] Although it was articulated in various ways, stretching from the more conservative to the more liberal, the basic justification for limited suffrage was that only a minority – those of superior capacities and sufficient 'independence', as secured by their wealth, profession and education – were able to put aside their self-interest and act in the public good and general interest. When they voted, they did so for others. In this sense, elections were communal affairs because they staged a process that was at once highly exclusive and inclusive.

We see this in the self-consciously inclusive rhetoric that issued from the hustings in Britain, which was full of appeals not just to 'electors' but to the 'community' as a whole and pledges to act in the interests of all. Candidates presented themselves as 'friends of the people', and radicals in particular would often stress that they were addressing 'electors and non-electors'. Indeed, in Britain the publicity that attended the casting of votes was seen as the practical expression of the widely endorsed principle that the franchise was a 'public trust'. It was a sentiment that became even more pronounced from the 1830s, when the secret ballot emerged as a possible alternative. Even those in favour of expanding the franchise remained wedded to voting in public, not least because, as one pamphlet put in 1854, it afforded non-electors the edifying spectacle of 'seeing those eminent for their wisdom, talent and position vote for or against representatives of any particular policy, or for or against

any particular individuals.' It was the only method of voting in keeping with the idea that 'the franchise is a trust for the benefit of the community'.[34] No such logic operated in France, where, as we have seen, voting took place within the confines of an assembly restricted to a tiny minority of electors. Nonetheless, the same sense that electors ought to prioritize the public good, laying aside any class or partisan interests of their own so that they could speak for all, was widespread. As the president of one assembly in Marseille put it in 1831, in his opening address, 'Voters, elite of the nation, do not forget that all the French people form a single family.'[35] The printed material that publicized elections contained similar conceptions of the franchise. A pamphlet which circulated in the western department of the Maine-et-Loire during the general election of 1830 stated that the electoral colleges were designed to express the wishes and needs of 'the entire nation' and, as such, they formed the country's 'grand council'.[36]

In this way, the presence of non-electors, whether as passive spectators or as animated, abusive members of a crowd – a line that was frequently crossed in these intrinsically fluid situations – was not necessarily illegitimate or incidental. Quite the contrary, it was a constitutive, legitimate, if unpredictable, part of the civic nature of elections under limited suffrage and the ceremonial staging of power. Yet it **is** also clear that this peculiar culture of elections also afforded opportunities for the assertion of organized, articulate, oppositional forms of agency. However much the elites and electors were, in theory, obliged to represent and speak for others, some non-electors clearly resented their formal exclusion, devising various means to impress their views on electors, or influence the electoral process. The heckling of candidates on the hustings in Britain and the haranguing of electors before and after voting in both countries are obvious, if crude, examples of this, but more refined tactics were practised. In the Côte-d'Or in 1830, for instance, an 'Elector's Cantata' was sung to a familiar refrain by crowds outside the assembly, which sought to remind electors of their obligations to represent those without the vote: 'Wealthy citizens of France,' it began, 'do not disappoint our expectations in choosing deputies … reject the ministerial cronies and all who plunder the public purse.'[37]

More assertive instances can be found in Britain, where self-styled groups of 'non-electors' – most of which, it seems, were composed of radicals – held their own meetings, issued addresses to candidates, took part in the selection of (radical) candidates, and even threatened boycotts of shopkeepers and tradesmen who voted for candidates they disliked. The numbers engaged in this kind of activity might be substantial. At the 1832 general election, a meeting of almost 2,000 non-electors assembled in the centre of Sheffield to declare their support for the two radical candidates.[38] A reported 10,000 non-electors met shortly before the start of the 1841 election to do the same in the neighbouring Yorkshire town of Bradford.[39] Above all, the public occasion of the nomination, which was resolved by a popular show of hands, was exploited as a means of protest. At the 1832 election, factory reformers urged electors and those 'thought not worthy of that Privilege' to 'come and speak your minds' at nomination hustings across the West Yorkshire textile region.[40] Similarly, at the elections of 1841 and 1847, Chartists urged non-electors to attend the nomination proceedings and acclaim radical candidates in order to force a contest, even though

such candidates stood little chance of winning. As one provincial newspaper noted, although 'looked upon by some as a mere farce', it was an effective means of asserting their 'right to express their opinions … before an assembled multitude'.[41]

There are parallels here with the use of popular petitions, which for centuries had afforded those excluded from the formal apparatus of power a means of advancing their grievances. But these assertions of the right of non-electors to be heard during elections reflected a growing discontent with precisely this excluded status; and it is significant that it was during the early to mid-century nineteenth century when, in both countries, the use of petitions to press the case for franchise reform underwent a marked expansion, as indeed did the wider use of petitions.[42] In France, the franchise question mobilized more non-voters than any other issue under the constitutional monarchies. This was true of petitions opposing the law instituting plural voting in 1820, which attracted thousands of signatures from non-electors, as well as the sustained campaign to extend the franchise under the July Monarchy, which reached a peak between 1838 and 1842. In 1840, when over 2,000 petitions were submitted, almost 200,000 individuals supported a call for all 3 million members of the National Guard militia to be accorded the suffrage, and for all electors to be eligible for legislative office. Likewise, in Britain, the extension of the franchise was the subject of growing petitioning, culminating in the three 'monster petitions' submitted by the Chartists in 1839, 1842 and 1848, which garnered millions of signatures (for example, more than 3 million in 1842 alone).[43]

In this sense, elections afforded further opportunities for the assertion of political – and more especially radical-democratic – grievances against the very status of non-electors as such and their exclusion from the franchise. Whereas the role of non-electors as animated spectators and recipients of elite largesse can only have legitimized the electoral process and the social order that underpinned it, this kind of activity, developing alternative possibilities inherent in the popular form of elections, worked in the opposite direction. The same might be said of the violence that erupted during contests, which was equally capable of affirming and undermining the social hierarchies and exclusions that structured the culture of elections. Crudely, while some of the violence operated within the confines of what the elites were usually prepared to tolerate, some of it clearly exceeded these bounds, and it is this that we should consider subversive. The organization of gangs and the use of hired thugs to intimidate opposing voters is one instance of the former, simply because, on both sides of the Channel, this kind of instrumental violence was normally instigated by parties and operated with the connivance of the candidates and local elites. Likewise, the spontaneous violence that was the product of drink-fuelled exuberance, and had no other end than the pleasures of excess and physical confrontation, fitted the festive nature of the occasions; and here too the elites had a hand, since they paid for much of the alcohol that was consumed. To be sure, there was considerable discomfort regarding these forms of violence and the injury they entailed, which sometimes resulted in fatalities; but as was noted at the time, such violence also served to confirm the low morals of non-electors and why they were not worthy of the franchise (illustrated in the quote from France above, from 1827, though examples abound in both countries).

Yet we also find instances of more calculated, political forms of violence that not only expressed particular popular grievances but took aim at the general legitimacy of the electoral process. In both countries, crowds launched an assortment of missiles – bricks, dead cats, rotten vegetables – at candidates and electors who supported policies or parties they disliked, or who had offended the community in some fashion. They protested, too, at their subsequent victory by assaulting opposing groups of supporters, as well as the police and civic properties such as town halls. More strikingly, if more occasionally, crowds violently protested their impotence and exclusion by preventing the casting of votes and laying siege to polling arenas. During the general election of 1832, for instance, a crowd in Norwich led by members of the local Political Union, which agitated for a more inclusive suffrage, destroyed sections of the hustings where Tory votes were being recorded, and then burned the wooden wreckage in a bonfire in the marketplace.[44] The polling had to be stopped for hours, as the army was called in to suppress the 'outrage'. Similar incidents occurred in France. One especially violent episode, which was subsequently debated at length in the Chamber of Deputies, occurred at Marseille during the legislative elections of July 1831.[45] The prospect of a legitimist victory – that is, of candidates who supported the dethroned Bourbon dynasty – prompted a 'furious mob' to burst into one of the town's electoral assemblies as the votes were being counted, smash the ballot box and tear its contents to pieces. It was the culmination of disorder that had begun on the eve of the poll, when a crowd of roughly 6,000, wearing tricolour cockades and singing the *Marseillaise*, had roamed the streets, threatening alleged 'Carlists' (legitimists) as they did so.

A final set of practices that might be dwelt upon were those designed to mock and humiliate electors and candidates and, ultimately, sap the authority of the process and the social hierarchy behind it. These, too, were crude, and indeed violent, but they were more symbolic, and drew on customary forms of shaming and communal self-policing, notably the rituals of charivari. In France, 'rough music' was used as a means of expressing discontent with the result of elections, as well as deeper frustrations with the limited nature of the franchise. As Emmanuel Fureix has suggested, under the July Monarchy, the charivari became a general means of protest against those liberals who had been partisans of the Revolution of 1830, but then resisted any further change or 'movement'.[46] Public humiliation was heaped upon such deputies when they re-appeared in their home constituencies. This was the fate of Humann, a deputy for Strasbourg, who was seeking re-election in June 1831, having failed to support demands for lowering the suffrage barrier. He was obliged to endure 'rough music' on three evenings in a row, as gatherings initiated by university students soon attracted a few thousand members of the poorer classes.[47] In Britain, the more elaborate, ritualized nature of election proceedings afforded more opportunities for charivari-style mockery and satirical rendering. Chairing parades, which were designed to signify the coming together of a community in the wake of electoral discord, were a particular target in this respect, giving rise to 'mock chairing' parades. A variety of lowly inhabitants – labourers, chimney-sweeps, paupers, lunatics and even dogs - decked in the colours of the victorious party, were carried around to ironic cheers. The tradition endured deep into the century: at Wakefield, Yorkshire, during the 1868 election,

some local mill girls organized a mock chairing, dressing one of their workmates in Liberal colours.[48]

These were clearly powerful means of protest and all the more so on account of their customary derivation: as E. P. Thompson argued long ago, these communal forms of mockery symbolized the desire – and the ability – of the masses to wrest a portion of communal morality away from the clutches of formal, propertied administration (e.g. by magistrates), and enact it themselves in a purposefully public fashion.[49] At the same time, they resonated with populist currents of critiques that mercilessly attacked the corruption of the elites. Britain and France were both home to established cultures of underground, 'grub street' journalism that used slander, caricature and pornographic imagery to this end. Yet, once more, we should be wary of imputing too much subversive agency to these forms. For one thing, in both countries, elections licensed a degree of popular disrespect for authority that would have been prohibited in normal times, much as they gave scope for unusual degrees of violence and festive indulgence. Indeed, in Britain, parties themselves often became embroiled in unseemly exchanges of 'squibs' – printed 'addresses' and crude verse that circulated on handbills, and could be sung – which openly insulted candidates, highlighting their hypocrisy, accusing them of corruption, and questioning their patriotic and manly credentials. In this sense, they were not necessarily antithetical to the general spirit of elections, as sanctioned and indulged by the elites. More generally, as Thompson again has suggested, the symbolism inscribed in these customary forms of mockery was not entirely their own.[50] Quite the contrary: they inverted official forms (for instance, the pomp of ceremonial music and formal chairings), and to this extent drew their energy and efficacy from the very authoritative status of the latter. Whatever subversive power these customary forms may have carried was also an expression of the powerlessness of those excluded from the 'official nation' – and a very public one at that.

Conclusion: The Decline of Popular Electoral Culture

In both countries the advent of more inclusive, male franchises was accompanied by the introduction of procedural innovations that gradually tamed, and ultimately neutered, the forms of popular involvement outlined above. In France, after 1848, the introduction of universal (male, direct) suffrage was facilitated by the introduction of *bureaux de vote* (polling stations) and the use of pre-prepared ballot papers, putting an end to the tradition of voting in assemblies, which had been maintained since the revolutionary decade of the 1790s. This individualized and to a degree privatized the act of voting and it was eventually followed in 1914 by the adoption of fully secret voting. The change in Britain was rather more dramatic. Some five years after a further extension of the parliamentary franchise in 1867, the British switched from open voting to a form of secure secret balloting using uniform papers marked in private and, at the same time, the great communal practice of public nominations was abolished. As historians have stressed, even with these new procedures in places, elections remained boisterous affairs well beyond the nineteenth century. Ballot papers were distributed outside polling stations in France until 1919, creating what one

commentator described as a 'fairground atmosphere', where electors were jostled and cajoled.[51] Set piece battles between rival supporters were still erupting in the interwar period. Likewise, in Britain, public meetings of candidates, which soon became known as 'hustings', were home to heckling and occasional punch-ups.[52] Meanwhile, political ridicule and satire continued to flourish in print and song. Nonetheless, the long-term equation holds good: the advent of mass franchises was accompanied by the development of a culture of elections that was decidedly more rule-bound and encouraged more orderly elections. It is tempting, then, to argue in terms of gains and losses: to weigh the broadening of the franchise and the arrival of the secret ballot against the eclipse of participatory forms that were inventive, symbolic and confrontational, and, in their own way, inclusive.[53]

For our part, we have sought to offer a cautious assessment of the powers enjoyed by the unenfranchised in Britain and France, though there is no denying that a vital civic dimension was eventually lost, with elections becoming mundane, media-managed affairs over the course of the twentieth century. Although the coming of mass, and then universal, suffrage was a welcome development, clearly some qualifications regarding its closely regulated character must be entered. However, as the introduction to this volume has suggested, the real challenge is to understand earlier practices on their own terms, as a product of contingent historic formations, outside of any modernizing trajectories or teleologies. The most striking aspect of the present comparative study is simply that there *were* commonalities in the roles performed by those without the vote, even if the details of performance differed and they were subject to varying degrees of elaboration. Crucially, we find the same *variety* of participatory forms afforded to non-electors in both Britain and France: as spectators; as abusive members of a crowd; as violent partisans; as recipients of largesse; as agents of mockery and symbolic protest; and so on.

This suggests the need to suspend another modern assumption when it comes to grasping the culture of pre-democratic elections: namely, that the principal purpose of elections is to enable voting on the part of the enfranchised. Structurally, what distinguished British and French elections at this juncture, under conditions of limited suffrage, is precisely that they were abundant, multi-functional occasions, serving a variety of political purposes beyond the vote. Chief among these were those of a festive and ceremonial sort, thereby opening up a stage on which the unenfranchised could perform – and improvise – a variety of roles, of varying degrees of subversive potency. In other words, it is not just that the advent of more inclusive franchises was accompanied by greater discipline and decorum. This development also involved a gradual narrowing of the meaning and function of the electoral process, reducing elections to events whose principal purpose was to facilitate and tally individual votes, and in a manner that was as efficient and as secure as possible. This is not to suggest that voting was unimportant earlier or that it was subordinate to other elements. In so many respects it was central. But voting was also, clearly, embedded in a seam of other practices which reflected the communal nature of elections in societies that still bore the stamp of long-established, and ultimately hierarchical, traditions of patrician-plebeian interaction – of elite largesse and popular licence, of civic ceremony and carnivalesque indulgence. In this context, the meanings of citizenship, and even

politics, were difficult to disentangle from those concerning the customary relations and rituals of still highly stratified, class-bound societies. Mass and then fully democratic elections would eventually emerge, but only once voting and the individual citizen-voter had been dissociated – conceptually as much as practically – from this complex of customary forms and social norms that had developed over centuries.

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[1] See especially F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties. The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and J. Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[2] However, see P. Tanchoux, *Les Procédures électorales en France de la fin de l'Ancien Régime à la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris: CTHS, 2004), S. Kent, *Electoral Procedure under Louis Philippe* (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1937) and C. Guionnet, *L'Apprentissage de la politique moderne. Les élections municipales sous la monarchie de Juillet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

[3] M. Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote. A History of Electoral Practice in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) 16–33.

[4] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*.

[5] Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote*, 235.

[6] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 106–41.

[7] Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote*, 135.

[8] M. Crook and T. Crook, 'The Advent of the Secret Ballot in Britain and France, 1789–1914: From Public Assembly to Private Compartment' in *History* 92 (2007) 449–71.

[9] A.-F.-P. de la Maisonfort, *Mémoires d'un agent royaliste sous la Révolution, L'Empire et la Restauration, 1763–1827* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1998) 286.

[10] M. Crook and T. Crook, 'Reforming Voting Practices in a Global Age: The Making and Remaking of the Modern Secret Ballot in Britain, France and the United States, c.1600–c.1950' in *Past and Present* 212 (2011) 209–17.

[11] F. O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England 1780–1860' in *Past & Present* 135 (1992) 79–115.

[12] O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies', 83.

[13] Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 85.

[14] K. Rix, 'Elections and electioneering, 1832–1868' https://artuk.org/discover/curations/elections-and-electioneering-1832-1868/template/storyline, accessed 23.5.21.

[15] Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 92.

[16] P. Triomphe, 'Un succès ministériel au milieu d'âpres controverses idéologiques. Les élections de 1818 dans le Gard' in *Annales du Midi* 121 (2009) 359.

[17] AN F7 6741 Préfet du Pas-de-Calais au ministre, 11 Feb. 1824.

[18] AN F7 6741 Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales au ministre, 21 Nov. 1827.

[19] AN F7 6740 Préfet de la Côte-d'Or au ministre, 26 Nov. 1827.

[20] AN F7 6741 Préfet de la Seine-et-Marne au ministre, 14 June 1830.

[21] AN F7 6740 Préfet de la Côte-d'Or, 26 June 1830.

[22] *La Presse*, 5 Aug. 1846.

[23] *La Presse*, 6 Aug. 1846.

[24] *Le National*, 13 July 1831.

[25] *Le National*, 30 June 1834.

[26] *La Presse*, 5 Aug. 1846.

[27] Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 95–9 and O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 138–9.

[28] J. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters. The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 31.

[29] O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 256–9.

[30] *Annales de la Haute-Vienne*, 30 Nov. 1827.

[31] W. H. Rowe, *The Ballot: Its Utility and Efficacy Proved* (London: Miller and Chapple, 1833) 12.

[32] E. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 252–87.

[33] An excellent comparative survey featuring Britain and France is A. S. Kahan. *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe. The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[34] J. E. Eardley-Wilmot, *Parliamentary Reform: A Letter*, 2nd edn (London: James Ridgway, 1854) 47–8.

[35] *Archives parlementaires*, 2ᵉsérie, Chambre des Députés, 30 July 1831.

[36] AN F7 6741, Préfet du Maine-et-Loire au ministre, 22 June 1830.

[37] AN F7 6740, Préfet de la Côte-d'Or au ministre, 26 June 1830.

[38] 'The Non-Electors', *Sheffield Independent*, 28 July 1832.

[39] 'Great Meeting at Bradford', *Northern Star*, 12 June 1841.

[40] Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, 16.

[41] 'Election Proceedings', *York Herald*, 26 June 1841.

[42] R. Huzzey and H. Miller, 'Petitions, Parliament and Political Culture: Petitioning the House of Commons, 1780–1918' in *Past & Present* 248 (2020) 123–64. See also Miller's contribution to this volume.

[43] P. A. Pickering, '"And Your Petitioners & c"': Chartist Petitioning in Popular Politics, 1838–48' in *English Historical Review* 116 (2001) 368–88.

[44] 'Riot at Norwich', *Hull Packet*, 18 Dec. 1832.

[45] *Archives parlementaires*, 2ᵉsérie, Chambre des Députés, 30 July 1831.

[46] E. Fureix, 'Le charivari politique: un rite de surveillance civique dans les années 1830' in A. Beaurepaire-Hernandez and J. Guedj (eds.), *L'Entre-deux électoral. Une autre histoire de la représentation politique en France* (XIXᵉ-XXᵉ siècle) (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015) 53–70.

[47] Fureix, 'Le charivari politique', 69.

[48] Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, 21.

[49] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 530, and also, C. Tilly, 'Charivaris, Repertoires and Urban Politics' in J. Merriman (ed.), *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hutchinson, 1982) 73–91. Where the use of customary practices for political purposes is concerned, see the contributions of E. Fureix and T. Jung to this volume

[50] Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 478–82.

[51] A. Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Les Élections en Europe à la fin du XIXᵉ siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1902) vii.

[52] Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, 51–65.

[53] E.g. Vernon, *Politics and the People* and M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England 1832–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 165–73.