Slave Revolts and the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire

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In progress - do not circulate

Abstract

The abolition of slavery in the British empire is often attributed to the actions of the abolitionist movement. The part played by the slaves themselves is typically sidelined. What role did the slaves play in abolition? This article shows that slave revolts in the Caribbean helped shift parliamentary support in favor of abolition. Members of parliament representing English and Welsh constituencies that were more affected by revolts, in the sense that more residents owned slaves in colonies with revolts, were more likely to vote in favor of abolition. This variation in exposure is plausibly exogenous and the results are robust to using an IV strategy. The evidence supports an economic mechanism for this result: revolts reduced the value of Caribbean slaves, shifting the support of slave owning elites towards abolition. The article discusses and rules out alternative interpretations of these results. Caribbean slaves were active agents in their own emancipation.

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

"Most writers on this period have ignored [the slaves]."

Eric Williams (1944)

1   Introduction

Two centuries after its abolition, slavery remains the subject of heated public debate.[1] The public's attention has recently focused on the reparations demanded by former Caribbean colonies, the removal of statues and street names honoring former slave traders, and the links between prominent institutions, like the Church of England and leading US universities, and slavery. These debates reveal that people hold divergent interpretations of the past, and these translate into different views about how the legacies of slavery should be addressed. The academic literature shares many of these same disagreements, and this renders it unable to contribute to the formation of a coherent popular historical memory.[2] Few issues have been the subject of more debate and disagreement than the question of why Britain abolished slavery.

Most accounts of British abolition fall into one of two camps. The first camp describes the abolitionists as selfless individuals who pushed through abolition even though it went against Britain's economic interests (Drescher 1977).[3] Some work even presents the abolition of slavery in 1833 as a moral high point in the country's history: in one fell swoop, Britain made up for its earlier involvement in slavery (Taylor 2020, p.xii-xiii).[4] The other camp, associated with the work of Williams (1944), sees abolition as a result

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[1] This article will use the term slavery to refer to African chattel slavery.

[2] For example, there has been a long debate on the relationship between slavery and industrialization (Heblich, Redding, and Voth 2022; Berg and Hudson 2023). There is also considerable work documenting the short and long-term consequences of slavery (e.g., Beigelman 2024; Charnysh and Lall 2024).

[3] Drescher (1977) made this point in a book entitled 'Econocide', its name emphasizing the economic damage abolitionists inflicted on Britain in order to abolish the slave trade. Recent work by Figueroa and Fouka (2023) shows that both changed values and the economic interest of non-slave owners contributed to abolition.

[4] The abolition bill was voted through parliament on 22 July 1833, with slavery formally ending on 1 August 1834.

of the decline of the Caribbean sugar economies. In his seminal book "Capitalism and Slavery", Williams called the abolitionist campaign "one of the greatest propaganda movements of all time" (p.169), and accused the abolitionists of using moral outrage to hide their true economic motivations. Yet despite the stark differences between these two camps, they share a focus on the actions of people who resided in Britain.

These accounts of abolition sideline the role of the slaves. The slaves engaged in near constant acts of resistance, and occasionally organized revolts in which they participated in their thousands (Craton 1982). Although authors like Williams (1944) have referred to a possible connection between slave revolts and abolition, the extent to which these revolts mattered and why they did so has received limited attention. The relatively small number of authors who have studied these Caribbean slave revolts have primarily been interested in how these informed the actions of the British abolitionist movement (e.g., Craton 1982; Matthews 2006).

This article examines the role of Caribbean slave revolts in securing parliamentary support for abolition. It presents a theoretical framework that outlines one way in which slave revolts could have affected abolition: the revolts caused widespread destruction, disrupted exports and increased the costs of security in the affected colonies. This reduced the value of investment assets in these colonies, including the value of slaves. This in turn made abolition, which involved surrendering the ownership of slaves in exchange for compensation, more attractive for slave owners.[5]

This article finds empirical support for the hypothesis that slave revolts helped shift parliamentary support in favor of abolition. In particular, MPs representing constituencies that were more exposed to slave revolts, in the sense that they had more residents who owned slaves in colonies that experienced these revolts, were more likely to support abolition-related votes in parliament. The effect was large, explaining between 37 and 43 votes for abolition, depending on how the effect is calculated.[6] The variation in the extent to which different areas were exposed to slave revolts is plausibly exogenous, and the

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[5] As early as 1823, the abolitionists accepted that abolition would necessarily involve compensation for slave owners, as precedent dictated that compensation was due whenever the government interfered with private property. In 1825 the abolitionists estimated that compensation could reach £33m. In the end, the agreed amount was £20m.

[6] The sample I use has 192 (borough) constituencies.

results are robust to using a number of strategies that address the possible endogeneity concerns.[7]

To evaluate the hypothesized mechanism, the article employs newly collected archival data for colonial Jamaica. Jamaica had by far the largest number of slaves and the biggest economy in the British Caribbean. I find that the price of Jamaican slaves fell after the colony experienced a large revolt, consistent with the idea that revolts reduced asset values. This fall in prices coincided with increases in the cost of running the colony: following a slave revolt, spending on security (military and police) increased, exports fell and the colony issued more debt.[8]

The article then considers two ways in which slave owners could have influenced the abolition vote in parliament. First, it looks at MP candidates in the 1832 election who had publicly pledged to support abolition if elected. These candidates were not more likely to run or to win in constituencies with high exposure to slave revolts. However, many unpledged candidates who were elected in highly exposed constituencies did go on to support abolition. Second, the number of pro-abolition petitions sent to parliament the year after a slave revolt went up by more in constituencies that had been highly exposed. Taken together, results are consistent with slave owners voting for non-abolitionist candidates, then pressuring them privately and through petitions to support an abolition bill under terms that were favorable to them.[9]

This article also shows that these findings cannot be explained by the most common accounts of abolition. It considers three in detail: that abolition was a consequence of the decline of the Caribbean sugar economies; that it was a result of the well intentioned

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[7] I focus on a reduced sample, exploit time variation and use an IV strategy.

[8] Jamaica had its own assembly and was to some extent self-governing. See Graham (2017) for a more detailed account of governance in colonial Jamaica.

[9] Electing MPs endorsed by the pro-abolition movement could have resulted in abolition under less favorable terms, but also on other policies the slave owners opposed. The variation in petitioning is unlikely to be the result of public activism by non-owners: this would have required them to know where the slave owners lived and where in the Caribbean they owned slaves. Slave owners could have organized petitions, or at the very least refused to block them locally. See Huzzey (2019) for a detailed account of how anti-slavery petitions were organized.

actions of the abolitionists; and that it was a (perhaps unintended) consequence of electoral reform. Although each of these factors is likely to have played its part, slave revolts had an independent and important role in the abolition of slavery in the British empire.

This article's main contribution is to show that slaves in the Caribbean were active agents in their own emancipation. Abolition was not simply granted to them: they played a key role in winning their freedom. This helps revisit common understandings of abolition and represents a meaningful contribution to the greater literature on coerced labor and its abolition (e.g., Markevich and Zhuravskaya 2018).[10] My findings also contribute to two other important literatures in political science. The first examines how protest and activism can lead to political change (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2000; Aidt and Franck 2015), while the second studies how changes in asset values can affect political behavior (e.g., Ansell 2014; Ansell and Adler 2019; Jha and Shayo 2019; Besley and Mueller 2012). The next section discusses these contributions in more detail.

2 Contribution and related literature

2.1 The abolition of slavery

There are two main accounts of British abolition. The first, commonly associated with Eric Williams, focuses on the economic decline of the West Indian colonies (Williams 1944; Ragatz 1928). For Williams (1944), abolition was the result of a switch in Britain towards industrial capitalism, and he is cynical about the motives of many prominent abolitionists. Meadowcroft (2024) has argued that self-interest motivated both pro-abolition and pro-slavery, consistent with a model where public moral arguments and private lobbying work as complements. Looking at abolition in other contexts confirms that economic concerns are often important. Masera and Rosenberg (2023) show that the decline in pro-slavery support in the US South was partly a result of a loss in comparative advantage in the production of cotton. Seyler and Silve (2022) consider abolition in Brazil and find that

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[10] This article also contributes to new imperial history, which is a history that explicitly considers the relationship between the metropole and its colonies. Most of this work focuses on social history, while this article emphasizes how events in the colonies affected politics in the metropole.

slavery-intensive districts opposed abolition, while those with more immigrants tended to support it.

William's account generated considerable backlash, of which perhaps the most well known example is Drescher (1977). Numerous studies have emphasized the role of the abolitionist movement in making the British public aware of the horrors of slavery and in mobilizing the population in support of abolition (Anesty 1975; Davis 1966; Hurwitz 1973). Using similar sources to Williams (1944), this work questions whether the Caribbean economy was truly in decline (Drescher 1977; Hurwitz 1973; Anesty 1975) and whether slavery was really as important to Britain's economy as William's account suggests (Eltis and Engerman 2000; Solow and Engerman 1987). Instead, they argue that abolition was a result of a change in values (Davis 1966, 1975; Figueroa and Fouka 2023).[11] A related line of work sees the Great Reform Act of 1832 as an important factor in abolition (Hochschild 2005), but the mechanism is again a change in ideas: the reform brought into parliament MPs who had new views about slavery and abolition.[12]

These accounts all focus on Britain and neglect the actions of the slaves. Although a number of authors refer to the slaves and their revolts, the connection to abolition is often underdeveloped (Williams 1944; Taylor 2020). The small literature that examines the consequences of slaves revolts focuses on how these helped strengthen (or weaken) the pro-abolition argument in Britain (Higman 1976; Curtin 1968; Turner 1982; Green 1976; Matthews 2006). For example, Matthews (2006, p.155) shows that the abolitionists tried to convince the pro-slavery lobby that it was in its best interest to abolish slavery, since otherwise its members could lose all of their property in a slave revolt. But there is little discussion of whether this strategy worked.

This article makes three contributions to this literature. First, it shows quantitative (econometric) evidence that supports the hypothesis that slave revolts helped abolition. Second, it proposes a mechanism linking the two, focusing on the costs the revolts inflicted on slave owners. This provides a link to the economic decline thesis that is central to the Williams (1944) account. Third, it uses newly collected archival data for Jamaica to

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[11] In a different context, Dippel and Heblich (2021) consider the role of leadership in the anti-slavery movement in the United States.

[12] The Great Reform Act eliminated some old rural seats, created new seats in newly industrialized areas and changed the rules on who could vote.

show the empirical validity of the proposed economic mechanism. In doing so, this article makes a contribution in the spirit of the new imperial history, revindicating the active role that slaves played in their own emancipation.

2.2   Other forms of coerced labor

To do.

2.3   Asset values and political behavior

This article contributes to a large literature that examines the effect of asset values on political behavior. Much of this literature focuses on voters and elections. For example, Ansell (2014) and Ansell and Adler (2019) document how the value of housing helps determine people's political preferences. Jha and Shayo (2019) show how exposure to financial markets can increase the support for peace. Consistent with the mechanism in this article, Besley and Mueller (2012) show that conflict can reduce asset values (in their case, housing values). A related literature considers how negative economic shocks, albeit not necessarily related to assets, can change political behavior (Margalit 2013; Rosenstone 1982; Anna Kern and Hooghe 2015).

This article contributes to this literature by considering a case of great historical relevance, the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, and showing that slave revolts induced a fall in asset values that helped push some MPs to vote in favor of abolition.

2.4   Revolts and political change

This article contributes to the literature that examines the effectiveness of protests, riots and popular revolts in effecting political change (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2000; Aidt and Franck 2015; Chenoweth and Stephan 2012). Much of this literature has looked at democratization, where a group fights to dislodge an autocratic regime. There is also a large literature that examines how protests can extract political concessions from leaders (Aidt and Leon 2016; Castañeda Dower et al. 2018) and the effect of reforms on protest

(Finkel, Gehlbach, and Olsen 2015; Finkel and Gehlbach 2020).[13]

This article makes two contributions to this literature. First, it focuses on the economic costs inflicted on owners by the protests, and shows that these can induce the owners of capital to support policies they previously opposed. Second, the article examines a context in which revolts happen away from the metropole, and so do not directly threaten the elite. This is a setting that is of relevance to the colonial wars of independence and to military occupations like that which followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This paper shows that protests can impose economic costs on the occupiers, making the occupation less profitable.

3 The historical context

The abolitionist movement was launched in 1787 with the creation of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The movement disbanded in 1807 once the slave trade had been abolished, but was revived in 1823 with the goal of pursuing amelioration: the improvement of the living and working condition of slaves. This campaign was a failure, and in 1830 the movement adopted full emancipation as its goal. In 1833, under the leadership of Thomas Fowell Buxton, the abolitionist group in parliament succeeded in pushing through legislation to abolish slavery. The slaves were formally freed on August 1, 1834.

3.1 Legislation

Abolition required a substantial amount of parliamentary strategy and compromise.[14] The abolitionist group introduced pieces of legislation almost every year, and the issue of slavery was frequently debated in parliament (see figure 1). The abolitionists faced opposition from a number of sides, including the West India Interest of planters and other beneficiaries of slavery, but also radicals who argued that British workers suffered

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[13] There is also work on how protests and riots affect voting in subsequent elections (**GrauVilaltaHix2024**; e.g., Leon-Ablan and John 2024).

[14] See Gross (1980) for a detailed account of the parliamentary process that resulted in abolition.
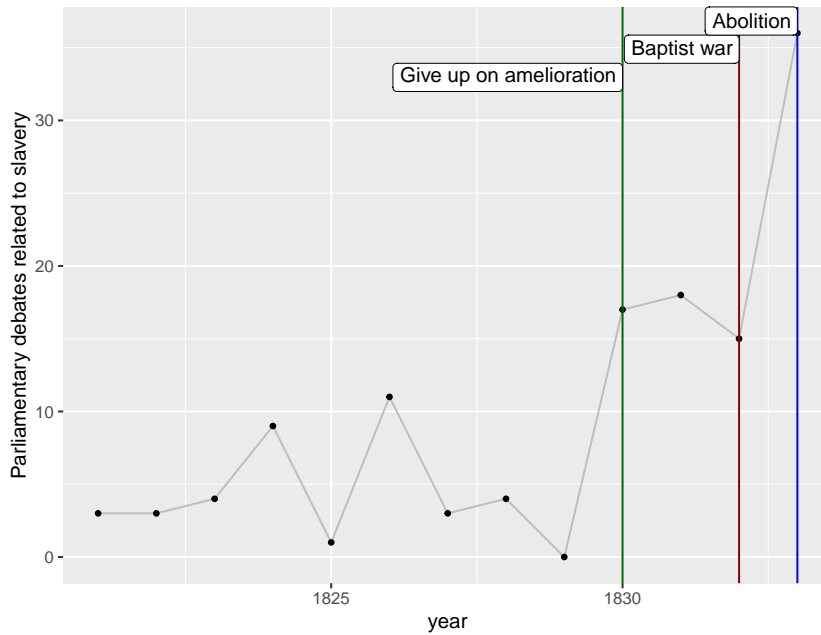
FIGURE 1: Number of parliamentary debates on abolition
(Source: Hansard)

worse conditions than the slaves and that abolitionists were simply trying to distract attention away from problems closer to home (Taylor 2020, p.244). The abolition bill was eventually passed after two key issues were resolved: the amount of compensation to be given to slave owners and the length and conditions of apprenticeship (this being the period during which slaves would continue to work for their former owners). The act passed its second reading unopposed on 22 July 1833 and received royal assent the following month.

3.2   Compensation and Apprenticeship

The idea that owners would have to be compensated in the event of abolition dated back to at least 1807 (see Draper (2010, p.86) and Taylor (2020, p.266)). Slave owners considered slaves to be their private property, and the established precedent was for owners to be compensated whenever the government intervened in private property rights, for example through the compulsory purchase of land (Draper 2010, p.85). By 1823 Buxton had conceded that abolition would involve some form of compensation (Matthews 2006, p.150), and as early as 1825 the Anti-Slavery Society had calculated the required amount of compensation to be around £33.6 million (Draper 2010, p.95). The prospect of receiving compensation also made it less likely that colonies like Jamaica would preempt

abolition by declaring independence from Britain.[15]

The compensation amount was subject to negotiation, fluctuating in number and form between a loan and a grant, before it was agreed that owners would receive a total grant of £20 million in compensation. This was a very large amount: 5 percent of Britain's GDP at the time, equivalent to £114 billion in today's money.[16] Claimants had to apply for compensation, and the information in these claims has been collected and made available by the Legacies of British Slavery project at University College London.[17] Figure 2 shows a map of slave ownership in England and Wales. Figure 3 shows a distribution of slaves across Caribbean colonies.[18]

The more difficult debate was about apprenticeship. The government's initial plan called for slaves to continue working for their former owners for 12 years while 'learning' to be free (Matthews 2006, p.171). This would in effect force slaves to buy their own freedom. The issue was debated until the very end, with the apprenticeship period eventually reduced to 8 years. At this point the abolitionists relented and accepted apprenticeship as a compromise necessary to secure abolition.

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[15] The offer of compensation was credible because the implementation of abolition required the collaboration of local colonial administrators.

[16] This value is 5 percent of Britain's 2023 GDP of £2.274 trillion.

[17] The compensation data can be found here: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/. The online appendix has more information on the compensation project.

[18] Once the compensation amount was set, rules were developed to determine how the money would be distributed across colonies. The rules took into account the number of slaves, the type of slaves (e.g., servants versus field workers), and the replacement value of slaves. From 1812 colonial authorities were required to keep detailed slave registers that showed who owned each slave. As a result, there was limited manipulation of the compensation process.

3.3 The slave owners

There were over 25,000 slave owners, including those who lived in the colonies and those who were absentee and lived in Britain.[19] Many of these were small-scale owners (e.g., 'widows and orphans') who owned a handful of slaves and were often several times removed from the person who had originally acquired them. Many of these small-scale owners had no land, and instead rented out the slaves to large plantations. A second group was made up of large plantation owners, many of whom had become prominent members of British society. The third group were the mercantile owners, largely based in London, who had come into ownership of slaves indirectly. This group included bankers and merchants who had taken ownership of a plantation's slaves after the plantation had defaulted on a loan. Draper (2010) describes the slave owners as follows: "metropolitan inheritors of estates who may never have visited their property, returnee slave-owners who had built up their own estates before retiring to Britain, mortgagees who had foreclosed, owners of two or three slaves who had inherited them or acquired them while on a tour of duty in the West Indies, or annuitants and legatees financially dependent on the slave-economy but remote from it not only physically but also socially and culturally" (p.140).

For many of these owners, the slaves were a financial asset; one that starting in the 1820s had become relatively illiquid. Few people in Britain were willing to acquire property in the Caribbean (p.186).[20] It had also become difficult to buy or sell slaves across the colonies: from 1819 trade in slaves across colonies was severely restricted, and a near ban in 1825 was zealously enforced (Eltis 1972). Because of this, Butler (1995) has argued that owners were open to compensation as a way to make their Caribbean investments liquid again (p.7). Similarly, 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). Compensation was a bailout in all but name.[21]

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[19] This is from the records of the UCL Legacies of British Slavery's data (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/).

[20] Those who did often did so as a result of defaulted loans.

[21] Although difficult to show empirically, it is reasonable to expect that slave revolts would have contributed to the illiquidity of Caribbean assets.

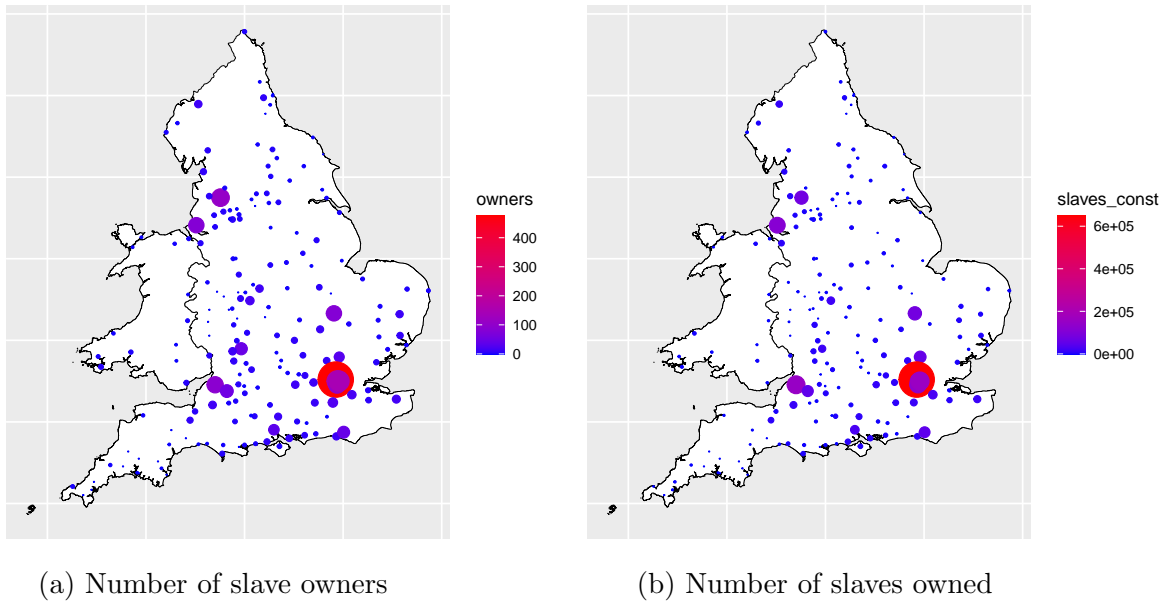(a) Number of slave owners   (b) Number of slaves owned

FIGURE 2: Slave ownership in England and Wales

3.4 Slave revolts

Britain's Caribbean colonies experienced both frequent low-level unrest and the occasional large revolts in which thousands of slaves participated (see figure 4).[22] Little is known about what motivated these revolts, as written records are scarce (Matthews 2006, p.58). But evidence from slave trials and the accounts of missionaries suggest two main causes. The first was the treatment the slaves received, including physical violence and the absence of payment for the work they did (p.76). The second was some awareness of the abolitionist debate in Britain (Williams 1944, p.193). For example, before the 1823 rebellion, a rumor circulated among the slaves in Guyana that the King of England had abolished slavery, but that local planters were refusing to grant them their freedom (Hochschild 2005, p.329). Slaves had very little access to information about what was happening in other colonies or in Britain, and whatever they knew was often from overheard conversations between white planters. It is therefore not surprising that revolts did not diffuse across islands.

The revolts rarely targeted the white population, focusing instead on the destruction of buildings and machinery. Nonetheless, slave owners in the Caribbean lived in fear of slave revolts and repressed them brutally (Matthews 2006, p.3). From the perspective of

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

Slaves by Colony (1833)

FIGURE 3: Slaves by Colony (1833)
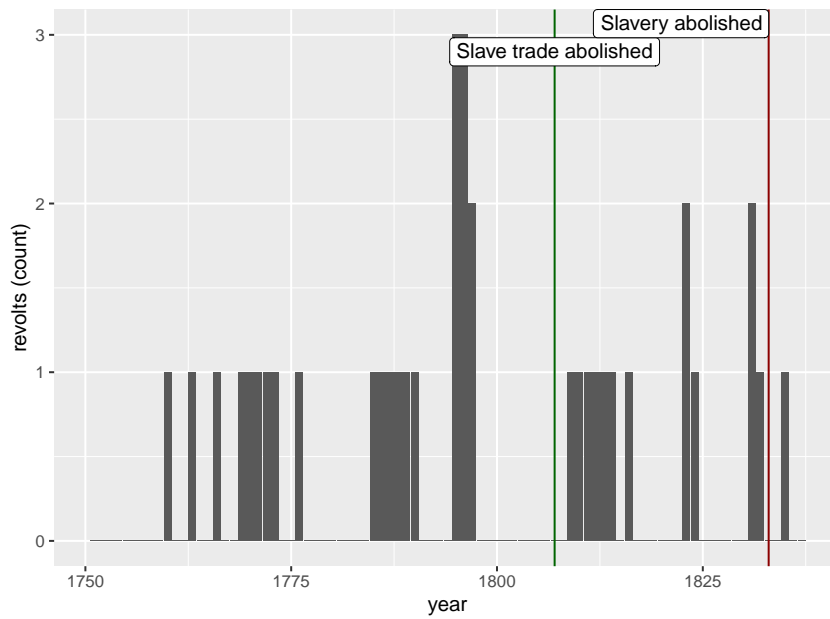(Source: Legacies of British Slavery)

FIGURE 4: Large slave revolts in the British Caribbean
(Source: Craton (1982))

slave owners living in Britain, the timing, location and size of these revolts would have seemed random. Slave revolts were widely reported in the British press, and British-based slave owners would have been aware of these events.

4 Framework: asset values and abolition

This article proposes a new theoretical link between slave revolts and abolition: slave revolts lowered the value of assets, including slaves, in the affected Caribbean colonies.[23] This made some of the affected slave owners switch their support in favor of abolition, and induced them to pressure their local MPs to vote for abolition (with compensation).[24] The reduced form relationship, which will be examined first, is:

$$\text{slave revolts} \implies \text{MPs of highly exposed areas support abolition in parliament} \quad (1)$$

where an area is defined as highly exposed when it had many slave owners, or when its slave owners had many slaves in colonies with revolts. Empirically, this means that conditional on the control variables, MPs from constituencies that were more exposed to slave revolts should be more likely to support abolition.

The hypothesized mechanism linking slave revolts and abolition is the following:

$$\text{slave revolts} \overset{1}{\Longrightarrow} \text{fall in asset values in affected colonies}$$
$$\overset{2}{\Longrightarrow} \text{affected slave owners in Britain support abolition with compensation}$$
$$\overset{3}{\Longrightarrow} \text{these slave owners pressure their local MPs}$$
$$\overset{4}{\Longrightarrow} \text{these MPs support abolition in parliament} \quad (2)$$

The first link indicates that slave revolts led to lowered asset values in the affected colonies. There are a number of reasons for this. Revolts generated immediate losses,

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[23] Matthews (2006, p.155-157) argues that the abolitionists tried to convince the slave owners that they should support abolition in order to avoid further slave revolts and the losses these would produce.

[24] The West India lobby argued that the expectation of abolition had reduced asset values in the Caribbean and made it difficult for planters to obtain credit. Abolition was a common shock, and so its expectation cannot explain the hypothesized cross-sectional variation.

including the death of slaves and the destruction of infrastructure. They also could have increased the perceived risk of future revolts, which in turn would have called for higher spending on security.[25] The second link refers to changes in slave owner support for abolition. The third link claims that MPs of affected constituencies faced elite pressure to support abolition. Link four then completes the reduced form relationship.

5   Specification and data

The main specification I use to establish the relationship in (1) 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 that equals 1 if constituency i supported abolition in parliament.[26] Unfortunately, I cannot directly measure whether MPs voted for the main abolition bill of August 1833, since this bill passed its second reading unopposed. Instead, I use the votes that helped shape this final bill: these votes were divisive and reveal who was in favor and who was opposed to abolition.

For seven of these votes, which were related to compensation or apprenticeship, the minority lists of MPs who voted on the losing side are available.[27] To determine whether

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[25] Formally, the increase in perceived risk would be partly offset by the increase in security spending. Whether security spending went up enough to fully offset the increase in perceived risk would depend on the risk preferences of planters. Yet taken together, this represents a fall in the value of Caribbean assets.

[26] The study focuses on the borough constituencies for the parliament that first met on 29 January 1833.

[27] This information is from Hansard (https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html); see online appendix C for a summary of the content of each debate and vote. For most parliamentary votes in this period, there is no information on how individual MPs voted. This is because Hansard only recorded this information for fewer than a quarter of all votes. The votes for which this information was recorded appear to have been chosen fairly randomly; for example, they show no clear pattern in relation to topic or expected size of the minority. Only the minority lists are available

the losing side was pro-abolition, I consider both the content of the bill voted on and whether it was supported by leading abolitionists in parliament, including Thomas F. Buxton and Stephen Lushington. In all seven cases the minority lists correspond to the abolitionist side. All seven votes took place in June and July 1833, and so after the last pre-abolition revolt. There is therefore very little time variation that can be exploited. Consequently, I code $vote_i$ as 1 if constituency i had an MP who voted with the pro-abolition side in at least one of these seven votes.[28]

The explanatory variable $revolt\ exposure_i$ measures the extent to which a constituency's slave owners were exposed to the revolts in the Caribbean, where exposure is defined as the number of slaves they owned in colonies with slave revolts.[29] The revolts varied in intensity (Craton 1982); I focus on those that took place between 1823 and 1832 and had at least 1,000 participants.[30] The framework in section 4 suggests two ways in which to measure the extent to which a constituency was exposed. The first is to simply count the number of owners who were affected:

$$\text{owners affected}_i = \sum_{j \in i} \left[I \left(\text{owns} \geq 1 \text{ slaves in colony with revolt} \right)_j \right] \qquad (3)$$

where j is an owner in constituency i. 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:

$$\text{owners' exposure}_i = \sum_{j \in i} \left[\frac{\text{slaves in colonies with revolts}_j}{\text{slaves}_j} \right]. \qquad (4)$$

because there was only one division lobby in the Commons, and it was used for the presumed minority.

[28] I treat absence from a minority list as as absence of evidence, rather than as evidence of the MP opposing abolition. This is because it was common for MPs to be absent from parliament. If the MP did not support the abolitionist side in any of the 7 votes, they are classed as not supporting abolition.

[29] In general, it is difficult to know which owners experienced direct losses during a revolt, so for most of the analysis I treat revolts as colony-wide shocks.

[30] I focus on these years because the abolitionist campaign was relaunched in 1823, while 1832 was the last year before abolition.

This measure increases with both the number of affected owners and the extent to which these owners were affected.[31]

Finally, I use a number of controls. I control for the possibility that a colony was in economic decline by using the change in sugar exports to Britain between 1826 and 1831. These data were collected from the Parliamentary Papers. I also control for petitions, which are a measure of local activism, using data from the Journals of the House of Commons (1823-1832). I also control for the number of owners, using the information from the Legacies of British Slavery Project. I control for whether a constituency was newly created by the Great Reform Act, using data from Philbin (1965). I include county dummies to deal with geographic heterogeneity. Finally, I control for whether a local MP owned slaves using information in Draper (2010).

6   Main results

The nature of the outcome variable means that most of this paper exploits cross-sectional variation across both British Caribbean colonies and English and Welsh constituencies. This section presents the main results, considers possible sources of heterogeneity and discusses some robustness test. The next section explicitly considers and addresses the problem of endogeneity.

I first consider the effect that the number of owners resident in an area and the number of slaves owned by these residents had on votes for abolition. The results are shown in table 1: the number of owners had a positive and significant effect on support for abolition in parliament, but the number of slaves did not. This suggests that areas that were highly involved in slavery were more likely to vote for abolition. The theoretical framework developed in section 4 suggests that this was as a result of slave revolts.

Table 2 considers how the measures of exposure to slave revolts in equations (3) and (4) affected support for abolition. It shows that constituencies that were more exposed to slave revolts were more likely to support abolition. To interpret these results, consider column 2 and the following thought experiment: take the difference between (i) the estimated likelihood that a constituency voted for abolition given actual revolts, and (ii)

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[31] Unfortunately, I have no information on these owners' other financial assets.

Table 1: Number of owners and slaves: effect and abolition (by constituency)

| Dependent Variable: | Votes (binary) | |
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln owners	0.1222*	
	(0.0564)	
ln slaves		0.0303
		(0.0210)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	-0.0043	0.0019
	(0.0086)	(0.0086)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0014	0.0028
	(0.0045)	(0.0044)
Fixed-effects		
new constituency	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.31643	0.30420
Within R^2	0.04686	0.02981

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

the counterfactual likelihood that the constituency would have voted for abolition in the absence of revolts. Then aggregate these differences across constituencies. This produces a total of 42.5 votes (and there are 192 borough constituencies in the sample). This is equivalent to multiplying the coefficient (0.14) in column 2 times the mean log number of owners affected times the number of constituencies. When this calculation is repeated using the median log number of owners affected, the effect is 37 votes.[32]

6.1 Changes in support for abolition

In 1826 parliament debated and voted on a motion criticizing the Jamaican authorities for the unfair trial and execution of 8 slaves. Of the pre-1832 votes in parliament for which the minority lists exist, this is the most closely related to slavery. I use this vote to get a sense for which constituencies switched their vote in favor of abolition, and which constituencies switched their vote against abolition. Since the 1826 vote predates the Great Reform Act while the 1833 votes take place after, this analysis only includes constituencies that existed both before and after the Act. Table 3 shows the relationship

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[32] My argument is that slave revolts made it more likely that owners would prefer compensation. I should note that the distribution of compensation does not appear to have been affected by slave revolts.

Table 2: Slave revolts and abolition (by constituency)

Dependent Variable:	Votes$_{1833}$ (binary)				
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Variables					
ln owners affected	0.1058*	0.1367*			0.453*
	(0.0505)	(0.0622)			0.1814
ln owners' exposure			0.1079*	0.1402*	
			(0.0497)	(0.0617)	
change in sugar exports, 1826-31		0.0192		0.0192	0.1178
		(0.0145)		(0.0145)	(0.0873)
ln petitions, 1823-32		0.0010		0.0009	0.0057
		(0.0046)		(0.0046)	(0.0124)
owners		-0.0041^{+}		-0.0041^{+}	-0.0209
		(0.0024)		(0.0024)	0.0125
Fixed-effects					
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
new constituency		Yes		Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves		Yes		Yes	Yes
Fit statistics					
Observations	192	192	192	192	159
R^2	0.29741	0.32164	0.29850	0.32316	
Within R^2	0.03272	0.05414	0.03423	0.05625	
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	Logit

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

between slave revolts and these changes. Columns 1 and 2 show that slave revolts had a positive and marginally significant effect on switches towards abolition (where the alternatives are no switch or switch against). Columns 3 and 4 show there was no effect of slave revolts on switching against abolition (where the alternatives are no switch or switch against). This is consistent with my account that slave revolts helped build support for abolition.

6.2   Heterogeneity

There were significant differences across colonies. First, some colonies like Jamaica and Barbados had long been part of the British empire, while Guyana and Trinidad had been acquired more recently.[33] Second, colonies differed in size and economic importance. In particular, Jamaica had the largest number of owners and slaves, and it experienced revolts, meaning that the regressions could be picking up a Jamaica rather than a slave revolts effect. Third, a revolt could have generated spillovers, in that owners of unaffected colonies may have responded in a way that was similar to that of affected owners.

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[33] This could mean that owners were of different types; I address this issue later.

Table 3: Changes in support for abolition (by constituency)

| Dependent Variables: | switched to support abolition | | switched to oppose abolition | |
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Variables				
ln owners affected	0.1672[+]		0.0334	
	(0.0934)		(0.0574)	
ln owners' exposure		0.1675[+]		0.0310
		(0.0938)		(0.0580)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0206	0.0208	0.0082	0.0081
	(0.0153)	(0.0152)	(0.0078)	(0.0078)
ln petitions	-0.0056	-0.0056	0.0043	0.0044
	(0.0050)	(0.0050)	(0.0041)	(0.0041)
owners	-0.0035	-0.0035	-0.0069[+]	-0.0068[+]
	(0.0033)	(0.0033)	(0.0036)	(0.0036)
Fixed-effects				
new constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
slaves owners in constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics				
Observations	141	141	141	141
R^2	0.35129	0.35146	0.51719	0.51695
Within R^2	0.06014	0.06038	0.05863	0.05815

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

For instance, Jamaica's Baptist war revolt (1831-32) was large and it was reported on extensively in the press, so that it could have 'treated' other colonies too.[34]

I address these concerns by defining five alternative treatment variables: *owners affected (Jamaica)*, *owners affected (Guyana)*, *owners affected (Barbados)*, *owners affected (Antigua)* and *owners affected (St Vincent)*. I chose these five because figure 3 shows they were the colonies with the most slaves. Then I estimate the main specification using these treatment variables one at a time. Consider the regression that uses *owners affected (Jamaica)*: only owners with slaves in Jamaica are considered to be treated. Since Jamaica had a large slave revolts in this period, we would expect this variable's coefficient to be positive and significant, and it is (see column (1) in table 4). Turning to *owners affected (Guyana)*, this regression only considers as treated owners with slaves in Guyana. Since Guyana had a large slave revolt (in Demerara), we would expect to find a positive and significant result, and we do (see column (2) in table 4). For *owners affected (Barbados)*, this regression only considers as treated owners with slaves in Barbados. Barbados did not have a slave revolt in the sample period, and so we would expect the coefficient to be

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[34] If there were positive spillovers, this would mean that the regressions underestimate the true effect of slave revolts.

Table 4: Slave revolts in different colonies and abolition (by constituency)

Dependent Variable:	Votes (binary)				
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Variables					
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0221	0.0031	0.0149	0.0198	0.0215
	(0.0143)	(0.0161)	(0.0153)	(0.0147)	(0.0135)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0011	0.0026	0.0040	0.0034	0.0026
	(0.0045)	(0.0043)	(0.0042)	(0.0044)	(0.0043)
log owners affected (Jamaica)	0.1491*				
	(0.0613)				
owners	-0.0046+	-0.0023	-0.0025	-0.0034	-0.0044+
	(0.0024)	(0.0025)	(0.0027)	(0.0027)	(0.0026)
log owners affected (Guiana)		0.1864*			
		(0.0870)			
log owners affected (Barbados)			0.0549		
			(0.0758)		
log owners affected (Antigua)				0.0773	
				(0.0831)	
log owners affected (St Vincent)					0.1726
					(0.1082)
Fixed-effects					
new constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics					
Observations	192	192	192	192	192
R^2	0.32669	0.31505	0.29909	0.30043	0.30983
Within R^2	0.06118	0.04494	0.02269	0.02455	0.03766

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

indistinguishable from zero, and it is (see column (3) in table 4). Like Barbados, Antigua and St Vincent experienced no large revolts in the sample period, and the coefficients for their respective variables are indistinguishable from zero (see columns (4) and (5) in table 4).

These results show two things. First, the results in table 2 are driven by exposure to colonies that experienced large revolts, and they are not simply a Jamaica effect. Second, since exposure to colonies without revolts has no effect on voting, spillovers from colonies that experienced large revolts are limited at best.[35]

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[35] Guyana received higher compensation per slave than Jamaica, but table 4 suggests that the differences in voting were due to differences in revolt exposure, no in compensation.

6.3 Robustness

I conduct a number of robustness tests that are reported in detail in online appendix H. I find that the results are robust to using MPs instead of constituencies as the unit of analysis.[36] One concern may be that the results are driven by London, which was home to many colonial agents and merchants. The results are robust to dropping London from the sample. A related concern is that the results are picking up the effect of the large Atlantic ports, Bristol and Liverpool, but again dropping these two cities does not overturn our results.[37] The results are robust to setting all non-Jamaican slave holdings to 0, and to setting all Jamaican slave holdings to 0. One concern may be that owners with many slaves, who typically lived in Britain, may have behaved differently from owners with only a few slaves, many of whom lived in the colonies. The online appendix shows that the results are robust to keeping only large compensation claims (i.e. restricting the attention to large slave owners) and keeping only small compensation claims (i.e. restricting the attention to small slave owners). The results are also robust to keeping only compensation claims that were successful.[38]

6.4 The timing of abolition

The analysis so far focuses on how MPs voted once the debate about full abolition was taking place in parliament. But there were large slave revolts earlier in the period in large colonies like Guyana and Jamaica, and as figure 1 shows, issues related to slavery were frequently debated in parliament. Why did abolition happen in 1833 and not earlier or later? A number of factors can help explain the timing. First, prior to 1830 the abolitionist movement was not seeking emancipation, but instead pursued a policy of amelioration. This strategy was unsuccessful: the government in London weakened the policies that were adopted, and these policies were largely ignored by the local colonial administrations that were in charge of enforcing them.

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[36] Some constituencies had the right to elect more than on MP.

[37] Glasgow was also a large slave port, but Scotland is not in the sample.

[38] 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 abolition with the expectation of receiving compensation.

Frustrated with their lack of progress, in 1830 the more radical wing of the abolitionist movement started to push for full abolition. Their reasoning was that nothing short of full emancipation could ensure an improvement in the living conditions of the slave population. This move faced stiff resistance from the West India interest in parliament, but the government ensured that progress could be made in the negotiations by passing legislation that tied abolition to compensation, and by inviting the West India lobby to help draft government legislation on abolition and compensation.

7 Endogeneity

The estimates in the previous section have a causal interpretation if

1. (no spurious correlation) Owners exposed to colonies affected by revolts did not disproportionally live in English and Welsh constituencies that for reasons unrelated to the revolts were more (or less) likely to support abolition.

2. (no reverse causality) Slaves were not more (or less) likely to revolt when owned by individuals who lived in English and Welsh constituencies that voted for abolition in 1833.

3. (no omitted variables) Shocks or factors that affected revolts in the Caribbean colonies had no effect on local votes for abolition in 1833.

The first of these conditions is necessary because revolts were rare events, and so even if they were fully random, the revolts that occurred could have produced a set of affected constituencies that was not representative of the universe of constituencies.[39] Condition 2 is likely to be satisfied because reverse causality seems unlikely: slaves had very little access to information and would not have been able to follow British politics in any level of detail. Section 7.1 further addresses concerns 1 and 2 using data on MP candidates who pledged to support abolition if elected. A constituency's exposure to revolts does not predict the running of pledged candidates or their election as MPs. This suggests that the results are not driven by a spurious correlation or by reverse causality.

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[39] Historical accounts suggest that all colonies were considered at risk of slave revolts, and that it was difficult to predict when and where a revolt would happen.

A more serious concern is omitted variables: the same shocks or factors that determined the likelihood of a revolt in a particular Caribbean colony could have affected the likelihood that areas where the corresponding owners lived would support abolition. To threaten the causal interpretation of the results, these shocks or factors have to vary across colonies or constituencies; common shocks or omitted variables that affected all Caribbean colonies or English and Welsh constituencies are not a concern, as they would not generate the cross-sectional differences I document.[40] But local shocks and local factors are a concern. For instance, it could be that owners from Jamaica (an old colony that experienced large revolts) tended to live in pro-abolition areas, while those from Trinidad (a new colony that did not experience revolts in the sample period) lived in anti-abolition areas. This would produce clustering of owners in England and Wales according to colony of ownership, with this clustering taking a form that produces the results I report.[41] Another example is a colony-specific economic shock; this is a frequent cause of civil unrest (e.g., Aidt and Leon 2016). In this setting, the shock could have contributed to the revolts, while independently making local MPs vote for abolition. As discussed in section 3, historians have attributed the slave revolts to other causes, and I control for the change in sugar exports. But controls can only do so much, and so below I address the issue of omitted variables in two ways: in section 7.2 I exploit variation in exposure within Jamaica, and in section 7.3 I use an instrumental variable strategy.

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[40] For instance, the West India interest often argued that the expectation of abolition contributed to slave revolts. But it was always clear that abolition would affect all Caribbean colonies and all British constituencies, so this cannot explain the differences in voting I document. Likewise, the concern that slave owners were on average wealthier and so perhaps more likely to live in London would apply to owners of slaves in all colonies.

[41] Related to this, the local intensity of the abolitionist campaign could have produced slave revolts in the islands where residents of the area owned slaves, while also affecting how the area voted on abolition. But as discussed above, this seems unlikely.

Table 5: MPs pledged to support abolition (by constituency)

| Dependent Variables: | pledged candidates | | pledged candidate won | |
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Variables				
ln owners affected	-0.0529		-0.1065	
	(0.0499)		(0.1001)	
ln owners' exposure		-0.0527		-0.1088
		(0.0496)		(0.0979)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0112	0.0112	0.0146	0.0147
	(0.0121)	(0.0121)	(0.0126)	(0.0126)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0100*	0.0100*	0.0134*	0.0135*
	(0.0044)	(0.0044)	(0.0066)	(0.0066)
owners	-0.0004	-0.0004	-0.0042**	-0.0042**
	(0.0020)	(0.0020)	(0.0014)	(0.0014)
Fixed-effects				
new constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics				
Observations	192	192	81	81
R²	0.42816	0.42816	0.47007	0.47075
Within R²	0.05773	0.05772	0.14264	0.14373

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

7.1 Pledges

Abolition was passed by the parliament that was formed after the election of December 1832 - January 1833.[42] Before this election, some candidates responded to pressure from the abolitionist campaign and pledged to support abolition if elected. The names of these pledged candidates were published by abolitionist publications in an effort to guide voters. I use the lists of pledged candidates from the abolitionist publication "The Tourist" to identify (i) which constituencies had at least one candidate pledged to support abolition and (ii) in which constituencies a pledged candidate won the election.[43] This allows me to get a sense of the extent to which constituencies were willing to choose abolitionists as their MPs. This helps address the concerns about selection, in the sense that more pro-abolitionist areas could have been exposed to more revolts (e.g., through feedback from abolitionist constituencies to revolts).

The results are reported in table 5. Columns (1) and (2) show that exposure to slave revolts had no effect on the likelihood that a pledged candidate ran in the constituency. This shows that either abolitionists were not running in these constituencies, or that candidates in these areas did not think that pledging would be electorally advantageous.

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[42] This election took place after the last large slave revolt, the Baptist war in Jamaica.

[43] I use the volumes published on 24 September 1832, 3 December 1832 and 17 December 1832.

Columns (3) and (4) show that exposure to slave revolts had no effect on the probability that a pledged candidate won in the constituency (although these results are possibly underpowered).

This suggests that areas with greater exposure to slave revolts were not more pro-abolition. This makes it unlikely that the results I report are spurious. If reverse causality was an issue, in the sense that the pro-abolition leaning of an area helped trigger the revolts, I would expect to find a positive relationship between slave revolts and the running and election of pledged candidates. But I find no such effect.

7.2 Variation within Jamaica

One concern is that the cross-colony variation I may be picking up variation in factors other than revolts that also affected how MPs voted. These include where in Britain the owners of slaves in a particular colony lived, as well as the different local conditions across colonies.[44] To help address this issue, I restrict my attention to Jamaica, essentially controlling for all shocks and factors that varied across colonies.[45] Jamaica was the most important of Britain's Caribbean colonies and had by far the largest number of slaves. And the Baptist war of 1831-32, the last large slave revolt before abolition, only affected the northwest of the island.

The Baptist war revolt began when a fire was lit on the Kensington estate. This estate was high on a hill and the fire served as a signal to slaves in neighboring estates. The revolt spread through northwestern Jamaica and soon spiraled out of control. The revolt happened in northwest Jamaica because that is where its leader, Samuel Sharpe, lived and went to church. The size and geography of Jamaica, combined with the slow flow

[44] For example, some of the colonies recently acquired by Britain, including Guyana and Trinidad, were growing strongly, while some of the older colonies, like Jamaica and Barbados, were doing less well economically.

[45] This rules out any factors and shocks that vary across islands but are probably constant within island. Furthermore, while it is plausible that owners with slaves in Jamaica lived in different areas than owners with slaves in Trinidad, in part because the colonies were acquired at different points in time and produced different rates of profit, this was not the case between owners with slaves in different parts of Jamaica.
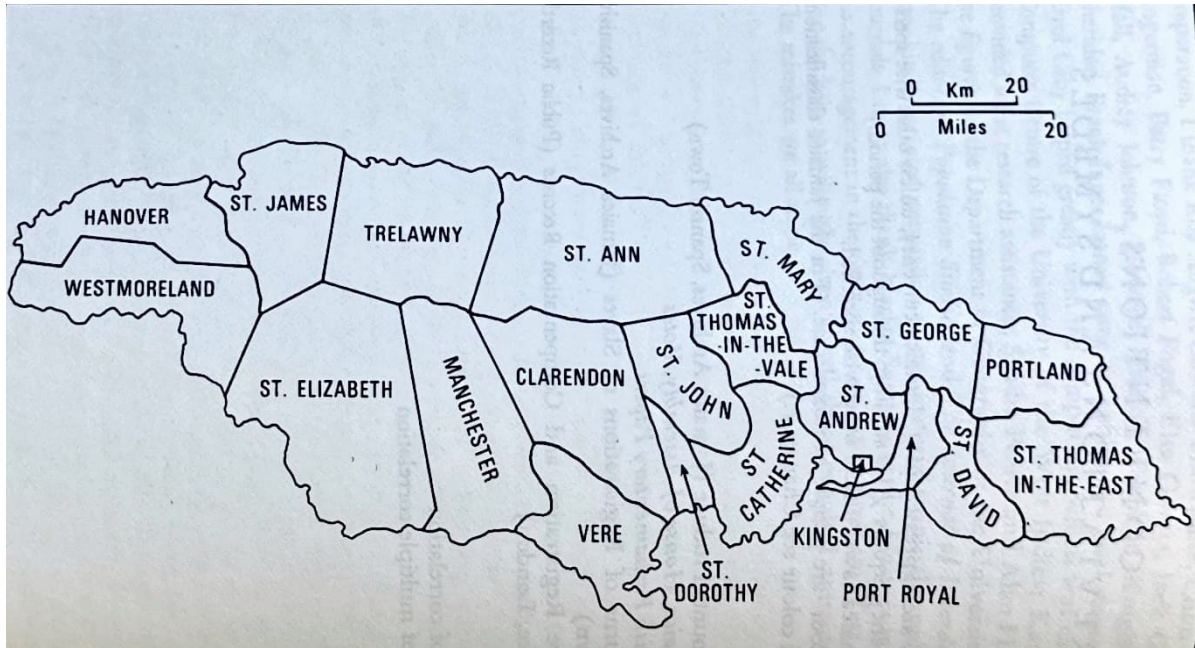
FIGURE 5: Map of Jamaican parishes as of 1833

of information across distances, ensured that the revolt did not affect all of the island. I define the affected slaves as those who lived in the Jamaican parishes where the Baptist war happened: St James, Trelawney, Hanover, Westmoreland (see map 5).

Figure 6 shows the number of slaves by Jamaican parish, with the affected parishes in a lighter shade. All four are in the top half in terms of the number of slaves, suggesting that there is some heterogeneity across areas that were and were not affected. Table 6 shows results where only slaves owned in the affected parishes are used for the exposure calculation. Thirty-five constituencies without slaves in Jamaica are dropped. (Slaves in unaffected areas of Jamaica are in the control.) As before, exposure has a positive and significant effect on abolition.

7.3   Instrumental variable: ruggedness

Returning to the full sample of colonies, I check for the robustness of these results by using an instrumental variable strategy. This addresses the omitted variables problem by focusing on variation in revolts that is driven by a factor that does not affect the votes for abolition in any other way (conditional on the controls). The instrument I use is the ruggedness measure from Nunn and Puga (2012), which quantifies "topographic heterogeneity in wildlife habitats providing concealment for preys and lookout posts".
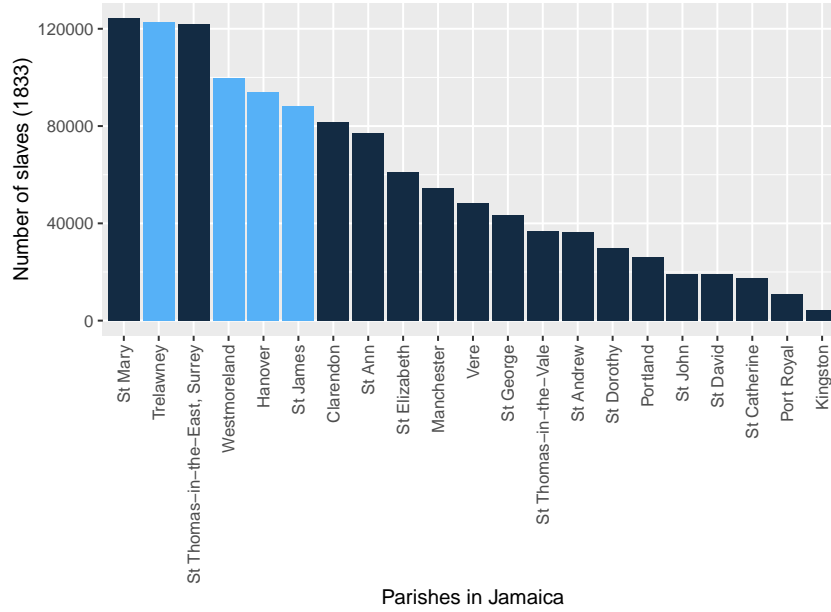
FIGURE 6: Slaves by Jamaican parishes

Table 6: Treatment is exposure to Jamaican parishes that were directly affected by the Baptist war slave revolt (by constituency)

Dependent Variable:	Votes (binary)	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln owners affected (Jamica parishes)	0.1795*	
	(0.0732)	
ln owners' exposure (Jamaica parishes)		0.1862*
		(0.0766)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0165	0.0158
	(0.0124)	(0.0124)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0014	0.0014
	(0.0047)	(0.0047)
owners_Jamaica	-0.0057+	-0.0056+
	(0.0032)	(0.0032)
Fixed-effects		
new constituency	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	157	157
R^2	0.39085	0.38967
Within R^2	0.07396	0.07217

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

In other words, it is a measure of terrain that makes the organization of a revolt and escape easier. For example, Jamaica is rugged and slaves who revolted could escape to the interior (e.g., to the Maroon settlements).[46] The exclusion restriction requires that ruggedness only affect an MP's votes through the effect it has on slave revolts

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[46] The Maroon settlements were communities of escaped slaves that were recognized and given certain amount of indenpendence by the colonial authorities.

(conditional on the controls and 'slave portfolio'). Nunn and Puga (2012) showed that this measure reduced agricultural output and trade. The Caribbean colonies were agricultural producers of export commodities, and so ruggedness could have decreased output and made its transport to the coast for export more difficult. To address this concern, all regressions control for changes in sugar exports to the UK.[47]

I construct the instrument as follows: for each English and Welsh constituency i (in 1833), I calculate an average ruggedness using the ruggedness of each colony in which constituency residents owned slaves, weighted by the number of slaves owned in each of these colonies:

$$IV_i = \left[\frac{\sum_j \left(rugged_j \times slaves_{i,j} \right)}{\sum_j slaves_{i,j}} \right],$$

where j refers to colonies and $slaves_{i,j}$ is the number of slaves that individuals in constituency i owned in colony j.[48] The first and second stage results are shown in table 7, and confirm the findings in table 2. Note that these results have an average causal response (ACR) interpretation: they show the average (marginal) effect on MPs' votes in constituencies in which ruggedness affects revolt exposure.[49]

8 The economic mechanism

8.1 Slave revolts and asset prices

The first step in the sequence outlined in (2) is that slave revolts resulted in lower asset prices. To show this I use data for Jamaica, which was the wealthiest Caribbean colony and had the largest number of slaves. I use data that I collected by hand from the records of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, including information on slave sales, number of slaves, land cultivated, spending on security, and local debt.

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[47] The correlation between ruggedness and land area in this sample is -0.18, and so ruggedness is correlated with colony size.

[48] Note that the number of slaves does not do the work here, as it only enters as a weight.

[49] This requires a monotonicity assumption: increases in ruggedness always have a non-negative effect on exposure to revolts.

Table 7: 2SLS: Slave revolts and abolition (by constituency)

First stage	ln owners affected (1)	ln owner's exposure (2)
Variables		
ln owners' exposure ruggedness (IV)	0.7152***	0.7170***
	(0.0328)	(0.0333)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0017	0.0014
	(0.0142)	(0.0146)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0059*	0.0062*
	(0.0025)	(0.0025)
owners	0.0026	0.0026
	(0.0023)	(0.0024)
Fixed effects		
new constituency	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
Adjusted R^2	0.94041	0.93814
Instrument F-stat	624.1	614.8

Second stage	Votes (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln owners affected	0.1431*	
	(0.0710)	
ln owners' exposure		0.1427*
		(0.0708)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0191	0.0192
	(0.0146)	(0.0145)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0009	0.0009
	(0.0047)	(0.0047)
owners	-0.0042+	-0.0042+
	(0.0025)	(0.0025)
Fixed effects		
new constituency	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.32159	0.32315
Adjusted R^2	0.04723	0.04943

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

Figure 7 shows slave prices in Jamaica. The series stops before the Baptist war revolt, but it includes the period before and after the Argyle war, a slave revolt that took place in December 1823 - January 1824. The figure shows that slave prices dropped suddenly and continued to fall after the Argyle war, consistent with asset values going down after a revolt.[50]

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[50] As discussed earlier, slaves had become a relatively illiquid asset. See, for example, **Dunn**. The prices are for slaves sold during the liquidation of estates that had gone bankrupt. Unfortunately no corresponding information for land values appears in the
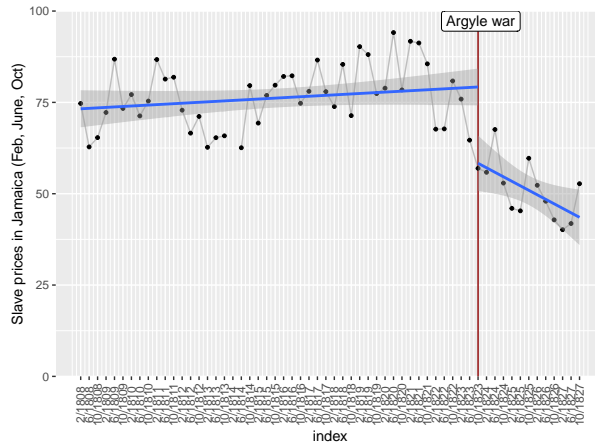
FIGURE 7: Slave prices in Jamaica
(Source: prices from slave sales under writs of *venditioni exponas*, from the records of the Assembly of Jamaica.)
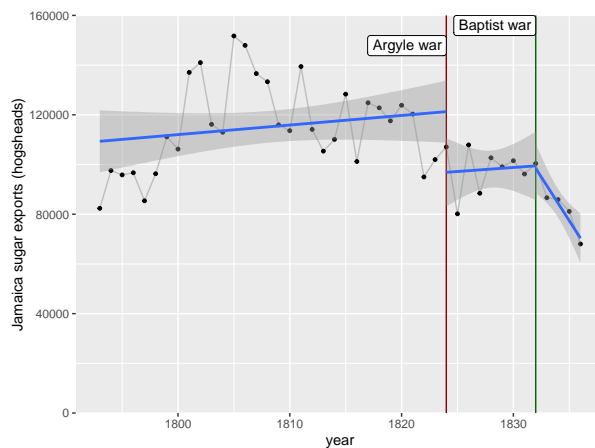

FIGURE 8: Jamaican sugar exports

This fall in asset values is plausibly a result of the effect the slave revolts had on the Jamaican economy. Figures (8), (9) and (10) show a fall in exports after the Argyle war and a change in trends following the Baptist war of December 1831-January 1832. Turning to military spending, figure 11 shows a sharp rise in spending during the Baptist war. The shocks appears to be temporary, but the fall in 1833 also reflects a change in the financing of security, with responsibility transferred from Jamaica to Britain (Graham 2017). There is also a continuous increase in Jamaican island debt during this period (figure 12).[51]

One alternative explanation for these results is that the revolts made abolition more

records.

[51] Slave numbers and cultivated land fell slowly prior to 1832, and so there was no great decline in the local economy (see figure A3 in the online appendix).
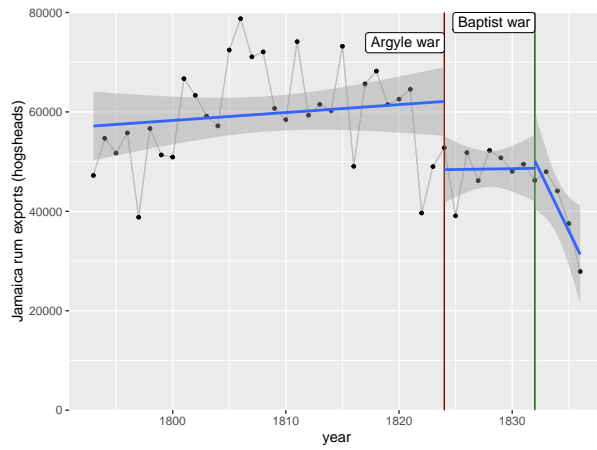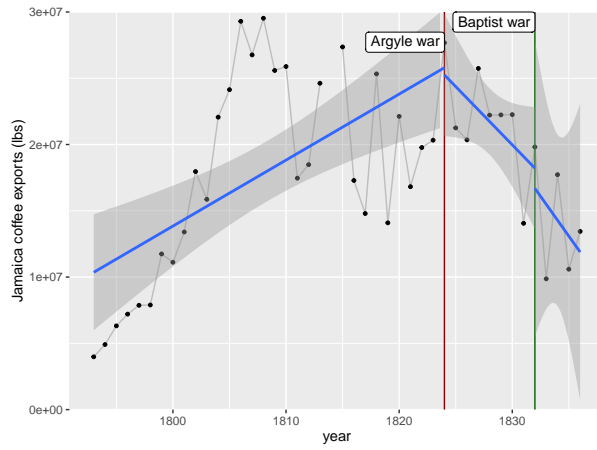
FIGURE 9: Jamaica rum exports
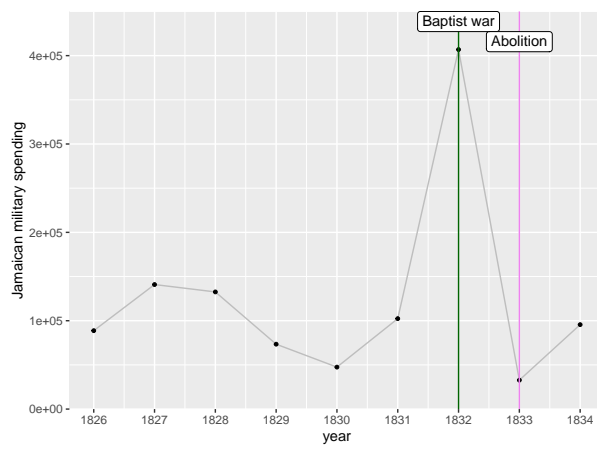

FIGURE 10: Jamaican coffee exports

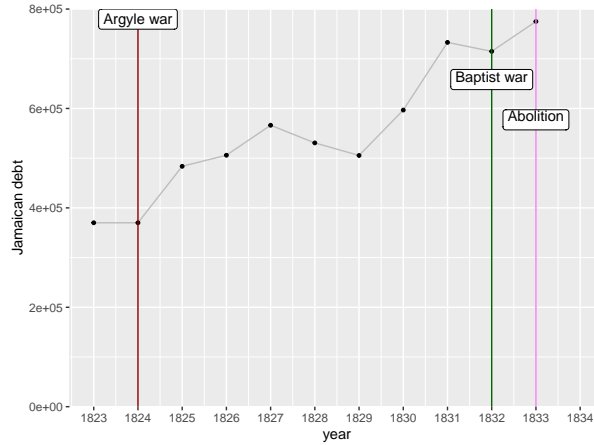FIGURE 11: Spending on security in Jamaica

FIGURE 12: Jamaican island debt

likely, and that this is what reduced asset values. Abolition would still be a consequence of the revolts, but through a different channel. However, this seems unlikely: abolition would have affected all colonies, yet table 4 shows that the effect of slave revolts was local to the colonies that experienced the revolts. Furthermore, figure 7 shows that the 1823-4 Argyle war revolt lowered slave prices at a time when abolition was not a likely outcome, as the abolitionists had only recently regrouped and were focused on amelioration. Another alternative explanation is that revolts made the loss of the colony more likely. The experience of Saint Domingue (now Haiti) loomed large in the minds of plantation owners. This though is an extreme version of the asset value hypothesis, since the concern is again the loss of the investments they had made in the colonies.

8.2 Slave owners changing their support

It is difficult to systematically observe whether slave owners changed their beliefs (link 2 in the sequence in (2)), but there is evidence that some prominent supporters of slavery changed their views on abolition. This includes some slave owners with large properties in the Caribbean and some members of parliament. For example, the Marquis of Chandos, the chairman of the West India lobby, declared himself an abolitionist in early 1833 (Taylor 2020, p.250). He also claimed compensation for 379 slaves in Jamaica. The timing of his conversion is suspicious, as the abolitionists had been very actively advocating for abolition since 1830. Alexander Baring, of the prominent banking family, was a West Indian proprietor who voted with the abolitionist camp on several occasions. It is plausible that Chandos, Baring and other West Indian MPs decided to support abolition

33

Table 8: Votes for abolition, by pledges

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

because they were perfectly content with the terms they had negotiated.

8.3 Slave owners and legislative change

I now examine how slave owners could have influenced the way in which their local MPs voted on abolition (link 3 in the sequence in (2)). Slave owners were relatively rich and many would have been enfranchised, and so their votes could have influenced the identity and behavior of MPs. They also could have directly lobbied their MPs.

8.3.1 Voting

Table 5 reported how slave revolts affected the running and election of candidates who had pledged to vote for abolition. Columns (1) and (2) showed that exposure to slave revolts had no effect on whether a pledged candidate ran in the constituency: either abolitionists were not running in these constituencies, or candidates in these areas did not think that pledging would be electorally advantageous. Columns (3) and (4) showed that exposure to slave revolts had no effect on whether a pledged candidate won in the constituency (although these results are possibly underpowered). These results show that highly exposed constituencies did not end up with abolitionist MPs, meaning that these areas were not more anti-slavery or "progressive". However, many of these candidates did go on and vote for abolition. Table 8 shows that most MPs who voted for abolition were unpledged. Forty percent of those who pledged did not support abolition; 74 percent of those who did not pledge did not support abolition.[52] This is consistent with an account in which economic interest, and not a change in ideas, drove support for abolition.

Table 9 checks whether controlling for whether there were pledged candidates or whether a pledged candidate won the election changes the results. This helps control

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[52] It is important to note that some pledged MPs may not have been in Westminster, and so their absence of support for abolition does not necessarily mean they opposed it.

Table 9: Control for whether a local MP pledged to support abolition (by constituency)

| Dependent Variable: | Votes (binary) | |
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln owners affected	0.1589**	
	(0.0581)	
ln owners' exposure		0.1625**
		(0.0577)
pledged candidate won	0.4164***	0.4172***
	(0.1080)	(0.1077)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0117	0.0117
	(0.0135)	(0.0135)
ln petitions, 1823-32	-0.0038	-0.0039
	(0.0043)	(0.0043)
owners	-0.0023	-0.0023
	(0.0022)	(0.0022)
Fixed-effects		
new constituency	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.40768	0.40951
Within R^2	0.17410	0.17665

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

for unobserved constituency-level characteristics like "progressiveness", and the coefficients on exposure are a bit larger and more statistically significant.

8.3.2 Petitioning

A second possibility is that affected slave owners lobbied MPs to support or oppose abolition. Much of this activity would have taken place informally. However, petitions to parliament were often used for lobbying, and all petitions received by parliament were recorded in the Journals of the House of Commons. The writing of petitions was often organized locally by local dignitaries who called a meeting to discuss the issue of the petition and coordinate its signing (Huzzey 2019). Slave owners could have influenced petitioning by facilitating this organization or by blocking it. I check for the effect of slave revolts on petitioning by using information on the number and geographical origin of pro-abolition petitions sent to parliament between 1823 and 1832.[53]

Table 10 exploits time variation in exposure to revolts and checks whether a revolt in a particular colony increased petitioning in English and Welsh constituencies that were highly exposed to that colony. The table considers a number of dynamic specifications and finds that in all cases exposure to a revolt increased petitioning for abolition in the

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[53] The petitions data is from Aidt and Leon-Ablan (2024).

Table 10: Slave revolts and petition for abolition, panel (by constituency)

Dependent Variable:			petitions for abolition$_t$			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Variables						
ln owners affected$_t$	0.1186$^+$	0.3633*	0.489*			
	(0.0619)	(0.1754)	(0.212)			
ln owners affected$_{t-1}$		-0.2336$^+$	-0.120$^+$			
		(0.1233)	(0.0707)			
ln owners affected$_{t-2}$		0.1410$^+$	-0.025			
		(0.0719)	(0.041)			
ln owners' exposure$_t$				0.1203$^+$	0.3693*	0.500
				(0.0626)	(0.1777)	(0.215)*
ln owners' exposure$_{t-1}$					-0.2391$^+$	-0.123$^+$
					(0.1250)	(0.072)
ln owner's exposure$_{t-2}$					0.1457*	-0.024
					(0.0730)	(0.041)
petitions for abolition$_{t-1}$			-0.441***			-0.441***
			(0.041)			(0.041)
petitions for abolition$_{t-2}$			-0.541***			-0.540***
			(0.121)			(0.121)
Fixed-effects						
Constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics						
Observations	2,010	1,608	1,608	2,010	1,608	1,608
R^2	0.51098	0.53024		0.51100	0.53033	
Within R^2	0.00292	0.01313		0.00296	0.01331	
J-test (overid)			96,372.56			96,046.45
F-stat (slope)			68,584.61			68,322.56
F-stat (time dummies)			113,598.61			113,781.73
Method	OLS	OLS	GMM	OLS	OLS	GMM

Clustered (Constituency) standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

year after.[54] These results are unlikely to be driven by the response of local activists, they would not have known who owned slaves or in which colonies. (The exception is the famous slave owning families whose names were closely associated with particular colonies.)[55]

8.4 Summary

Exposure to a slave revolts did not affect the likelihood that a constituency would have a pledged candidate running for MP, while many unpledged MPs ended up supporting

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[54] Using a lagged dependent variable introduces bias, which I correct using a GMM procedure. These results are shown in columns (3) and (6).

[55] Table A9 in the online appendix returns to a cross-sectional specification and considers the effect of exposure on the number of petitions in favor of abolition. This is imperfect because some of the petitions would have predated the revolts, and so it is meant only as a check. This caveat notwithstanding, there is a positive correlation between revolts and petitioning. Column (3) suggests that these petitions were effective.

abolition. Given the short space of time between the election (December 1832 - January 1833) and these votes (June - July 1833), these findings suggest that these areas were not more 'progressive'. Instead, it is likely that some conservative MPs supported abolition. Furthermore, slave revolts were followed by increases in pro-abolition petitioning in the areas that were more exposed, an effect that is unlikely to be due to grassroots activity.

9 Can other accounts explain these results?

This section considers whether the empirical results just described are consistent with the three most common explanations for abolition. This is not an evaluation of whether those individual accounts are valid; it is likely that they were all important contributors to abolition. Instead, my aim is to show that the empirical effects I attribute to slave revolts cannot instead be produced by any of these other three accounts.

9.1 Economic decline

Williams (1944) argued that abolition was a consequence of the decline of the Caribbean sugar economies: capitalist Britain sought to eliminate a form of production that had become outdated. Critics of his account often show that the Caribbean economies were not really in decline. Figure 13 shows the change in sugar exports to the UK from all major sugar producers in the Caribbean (between 1826 and 1831). This shows great heterogeneity: some colonies saw a sharp rise in exports, while other saw large declines. Jamaica, which experienced a very large revolt in 1831-32, only saw a small fall in exports at a time when planters were still making substantial investments. Guyana, which experienced a large revolt in 1823, had seen exports rise substantially. This suggests that the Caribbean sugar economy, when considered as a whole, was not in decline. Nonetheless, all regressions control for the change in sugar exports to the UK between 1826 and 1831.

9.2 Changed views

The most popular alternative to the Williams (1944) account is that the abolitionist movement succeeded in changing people's views about slavery, and that this resulted in MPs voting for abolition in parliament. However, a change in society's views cannot
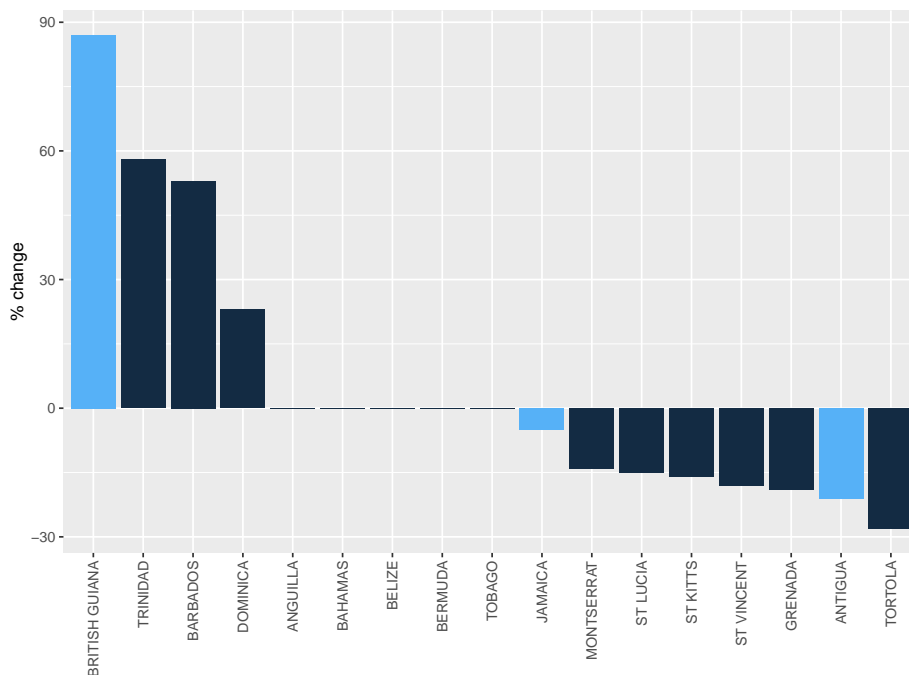
FIGURE 13: Change in sugar exports to the UK (Source: House of Commons Parliamentary papers). The lighter shade indicates that the colony suffered a large or very large slave revolt in 1832-32.

really explain the relationship between exposure to slave revolts and votes for abolition.[56] As an additional check, recall that prior to the 1832-3 election the abolitionists lobbied MP candidates to pledge their support for abolition. Table 5 showed that exposure to revolts did not result in constituencies electing pledged candidates, while many unpledged candidates voted for abolition. This is not consistent with slave owners having changed their views about slavery, but it is consistent with a change in their economic interests.

9.3 Institutional reform

Finally, one concern might be that the results capture the consequences of electoral reform, not of the slave revolts. In particular, in 1832 the Great Reform Act changed both the distribution of parliamentary seats and the number of voters. The reform was followed by the 1832-33 election that brought into parliament new MPs representing the

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[56] One concern might be that the activities of the abolitionist movement made abolition more likely, and this in turn decreased asset values in the Caribbean. This is a variant of the concern discussed in section 8.1, and as there, it can be dismissed because abolition would have been a common shock.

newly enfranchised areas. I could be attributing to the slave revolts the effects of this reform.

The Great Reform Act created some new constituencies and abolished others.[57] To address the possibility that the results are driven by the new constituencies, all regressions control for whether the constituency was created by the Great Reform Act (*new constituency*). The findings I have reported are therefore not driven by these new constituencies.[58] The second possible concern is that the scrapping of old seats reduced the pro-slavery vote, mechanically shifting the balance of power in parliament towards pro-abolition areas. But these constituencies are not in the sample, and so the effect of their loss is not reflected in the estimates.

The Great Reform Act also changed the voting eligibility requirements. The total increase in the number of voters was small, and about a third of surviving constituencies actually lost voters (Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2024; Fresh 2024). However, some areas saw a large increase in voters, and one possible concern is that these new voters tipped the balance in favor of abolition. If this was the case, we would expect constituencies that gained a large number of voters to support abolition. Figure 11 shows that the change in voters does not predict support for abolition. In summary, my results are not simply picking up the effect of the Great Reform Act.

10   Conclusion

This article argues that slave revolts in the Caribbean helped shift parliament's support in favor of abolition. It proposes an economic mechanism: slave revolts reduced the value of Caribbean assets, which included the slaves, and in doing so induced slave owners to shift their support in favor of abolition with compensation. These slave owners, who in large numbers belonged to the economic and political elite, pressured their MPs to support abolition in parliament.

These results support a (revised) version of the Williams (1944) economic hypothesis: the abolition of slavery was an economic decision, partly motivated by the negative

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[57] At the time, not all areas of the country had representation (Gash 1953; Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2024).

[58] Note that these constituencies were created in 1832, and so after the Baptist War.

Table 11: Gain in voters and constituency votes for abolition (by constituency)

Dependent Variable:	Votes (binary)			
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Variables				
change in voters	3.44×10^{-5}	3.4×10^{-5}	6.87×10^{-6}	6.72×10^{-6}
	(2.44×10^{-5})	(2.43×10^{-5})	(5.37×10^{-5})	(5.34×10^{-5})
ln owners affected	0.1292^*		0.1545^*	
	(0.0624)		(0.0734)	
ln owners' exposure		0.1327^*		0.1578^*
		(0.0619)		(0.0733)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0136	0.0137	0.0109	0.0107
	(0.0153)	(0.0154)	(0.0174)	(0.0174)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0007	0.0006	0.0036	0.0035
	(0.0045)	(0.0045)	(0.0065)	(0.0065)
owners	-0.0035	-0.0036	-0.0039	-0.0039
	(0.0023)	(0.0023)	(0.0027)	(0.0027)
Fixed-effects				
new constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics				
Observations	192	192	146	146
R^2	0.32763	0.32902	0.35988	0.36146
Within R^2	0.06249	0.06443	0.08236	0.08461

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

economic effect of slave revolts. The revolts helped change the calculations of many slave owners, who began to see abolition with compensation as an attractive economic proposition. Slaves in the Caribbean were agents in their own emancipation.

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Slave Revolts and the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire

A   Compensation and Apprenticeship

B   Caribbean slave revolts

This information is from Craton (1982) and Taylor (2020).

- Large (many thousands of slaves):

  - **Guyana (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 slaves 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 having helped incite the rebellion. He was executed and the possibly miscarriage of justice was the subject of a heated debate in the House of Commons in London.

  - **The Baptist war rebellion in Jamaica (1831-32)**: This was the largest and most destructive of the Caribbean slave rebellions of this period. The uprising was organized by Samuel Sharpe, and surviving accounts suggest that he did not intend the rebellion to be as violent and destructive as it was. The revolt began on December 27 1831 with a fire in the Kensington plantation high in the hills above Montego Bay. This was meant to act as a signal, and the revolt spread throughout the northwest of the island. The main motivation for the revolt appears to have been the desire to be paid for the work the slaves did in the plantations.

- Medium (thousands of slaves):

  - **Argyle war slave revolt in Jamaica (Dec 1823- Jan 1824)**: clandestine slave meetings and widespread unrest.

  - **Antigua (1831)**: Widespread unrest and arson after the banning of the Sunday markets.
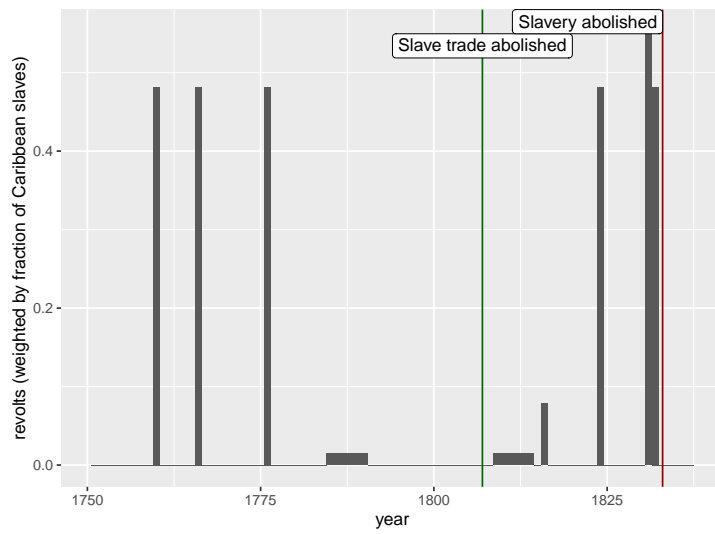
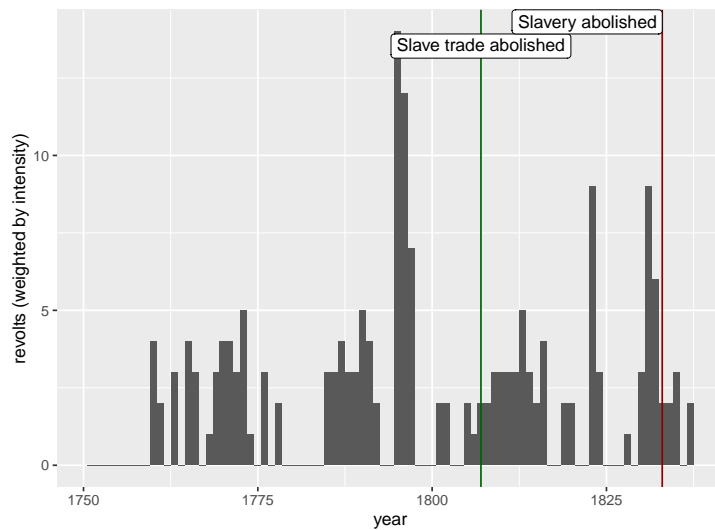FIGURE A1: Large Slave Revolts in the Caribbean (slaves)

FIGURE A2: All Slave Revolts in the Caribbean (intensity)

3

C   The parliamentary votes

I use all slavery-related votes in 1833 for which there was some information on who supported each side. The text of the debates that preceded the votes can be found in the historical Hansard (https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html). I used Chat GPT 3.5 to summarize the debates using the command 'summarize the content of this file'; the output from these queries is reported below in italics. See Gross (1980) for a full discussion of these debates and the context in which they occurred.

C.0.1   June 10 1833

The document is a detailed transcript of a debate in the House of Commons on June 10, 1833, regarding the abolition of slavery. Key points and participants in the debate include:

1. **Resolution on Emancipation**: The debate starts with the reading of a resolution proposing that all persons currently enslaved be registered as apprenticed laborers, gaining the rights and privileges of freemen while still laboring under certain conditions for a period set by Parliament.

2. **Mr. Fowell Buxton**: A prominent speaker in the debate, Buxton argues against the gradual emancipation and for immediate freedom. He highlights the moral imperative of ending slavery and dismisses concerns about economic losses to West-Indian planters and potential insurrections. He cites examples and evidence to support the argument that freed slaves would work effectively for wages, referencing successful experiments with task-work and wage incentives.

3. **Mr. Hume**: Hume interjects to clarify the source of his data regarding punishments in the army, which Buxton acknowledges.

4. **Arguments Against Immediate Emancipation**: Other members, such as Mr. Baring and the member for Middlesex, present counterarguments. Baring suggests a gradual approach, starting with partial experiments in certain colonies. Concerns are raised about the economic impact and the readiness of freed slaves to work without coercion.

5. **Examples of Successful Free Labour**: Buxton provides several examples of freed slaves demonstrating industriousness and effectiveness when given fair wages and conditions, including cases from plantations and other colonies where freed individuals integrated well and contributed positively to society.

6. **Moral and Humanitarian Arguments**: The debate also touches on broader humanitarian concerns, with references to the degrading effects of slavery on human dignity and the potential for freed individuals to lead productive and independent lives.

The document captures the complexity of the debate, reflecting various viewpoints and the tension between economic considerations and the moral imperative to end slavery.

What is the amendment that is rejected in this text?

In the debate on June 10, 1833, an amendment proposed by Mr. O'Connell was rejected. Mr. O'Connell moved to insert the words "for wages" into the Resolution. This amendment aimed to ensure that labor by the emancipated individuals would be for wages, rather than under the conditions proposed in the government's plan, which involved a form of compulsory labor in exchange for necessities like food, clothing, lodging, and medicine.

The Committee divided on this amendment, with the result being 42 votes in favor (Ayes) and 324 against (Noes), leading to a majority of 282 rejecting the amendment

Interpretation: this was an abolitionist amendment and so voting in favor signaled support for abolition. The minority list records those in favor.

C.1 June 11 1833 (comp, Briscoe)

The document titled "debate - 11 June 1833" primarily discusses various amendments and resolutions related to compensation for slave owners and the broader context of the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. Here is a summary of the key points and amendments mentioned:

1. **Mr. Fowell Buxton's Amendment**: This amendment was aimed at ensuring that half of the compensation to slave owners would be dependent on the full cooperation of the colonists with the decisions of Parliament. It was seen as a way to maximize the public benefit from the compensation. This amendment was rejected by a majority of 135 votes (Ayes 142; Noes 277).

2. **Mr. Wason's Amendment**: This amendment proposed that the compensation should be provided only if the West-India produce duties were lowered. This amendment was overwhelmingly rejected by a majority of 362 votes (Ayes 21; Noes 383).

3. **Colonel Evans's Amendment**: This amendment suggested that the compensation should come in the form of reducing duties on West-India produce. It was also

rejected by a significant majority of 324 votes (Ayes 22; Noes 346).

*4. **Mr. Briscoe's Amendment**: This amendment proposed to reduce the compensation amount from twenty million pounds to fifteen million pounds. This amendment was rejected by a majority of 248 votes (Ayes 56; Noes 304).*

*5. **Original Resolution**: Following the rejection of the amendments, the Committee voted on the original resolution to grant twenty million pounds as compensation. This resolution passed with a majority of 209 votes (Ayes 286; Noes 77).*

*6. **Additional Resolution**: Mr. Secretary Stanley moved another resolution to enable His Majesty to cover expenses for establishing an efficient stipendiary magistracy and supporting religious and moral education for the emancipated negro population in the colonies. This resolution was agreed upon after Mr. Buxton proposed adding the words "on liberal and comprehensive principles," which was accepted by Mr. Stanley.*

*7. **Mr. Rigby Wason's Proposal**: There was also a proposal by Mr. Rigby Wason to defray the expenses of the Government's plan through a property tax in the country, which was negatived without a division.*

Overall, the discussions reflect the complexities and differing opinions surrounding the implementation of compensation and the logistics of emancipating the enslaved population in the British colonies. The significant rejections of the proposed amendments underscore the contentious nature of the debates on how best to achieve these goals while managing the financial implications and ensuring cooperation from the colonial legislatures.

Voting information is only available for two of the votes

(i) The AYES on Mr. Briscoe's Amendment (The fourth division).

Interpretation: To reduce compensation from £20m to £15m. Voting yes was indicative of support for abolition. The minority list is for the AYES.

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

Interpretation: To grant £20m in compensation. Voting yes was in support of slave owners. Voting no was therefore in support of abolitionists. The minority list is for the NOES.

C.2 July 24 1833

The document titled "debate - 24 July 1833.docx" details a parliamentary debate focusing on the issues surrounding the abolition of slavery and the proposed system of apprenticeship for freed slaves. Here is a summary of the key points and discussions in the document:

1. **Compensation and Apprenticeship System:** - There was significant discussion regarding the proposed £20,000,000 compensation to planters if complete emancipation was granted. - The controversial apprenticeship system was a focal point, where freed slaves were required to work without wages for a set number of years as part of their transition to freedom. - It was argued that the apprenticeship system neither provided hope nor wages, making it an unfair extension of slavery. Some speakers believed that forcing slaves to work without wages was a gross violation of equity and akin to robbery

2. **Arguments Against Apprenticeship:** - Critics highlighted that the apprenticeship would not incentivize labor as it lacked proper motivations such as adequate wages and the fear of punishment. - There were concerns that this system would fail to instill the necessary habits of industry and self-reliance in the freed slaves, ultimately rendering the entire plan ineffective

3. **Views on Free Labor:** - Comparisons were made between the productivity and economic value of free labor versus slave labor. - Some argued that the economic burden of maintaining slaves, including their rearing and supervision, was so high that free labor would be more advantageous and profitable in the long run.

4. **Moral and Ethical Considerations:** - Ethical concerns were raised about perpetuating a system of forced labor under the guise of apprenticeship. - Calls were made for a peaceful and just transition to freedom that would benefit the slaves, the planters, and the nation as a whole. - The debate included passionate appeals to the government and the public to support the moral upliftment and fair treatment of the emancipated slaves.

5. **Outcome:** - The original motion regarding the terms of emancipation and the apprenticeship system was narrowly passed with a majority of seven votes (Ayes 158; Noes 151). - The debate concluded with a call for continued discussion and revision to ensure a fair and effective implementation of the emancipation process.

In summary, the document captures the intense debates and differing viewpoints on

the transition from slavery to freedom, emphasizing the challenges and ethical implications of the proposed apprenticeship system.

What is the motion that is passed in this debate

In the debate on July 24, 1833, the House of Commons passed a motion related to the abolition of slavery. The motion debated was whether the House should resolve itself into a Committee on the Abolition of Slavery Bill. The original motion was passed with 158 votes in favor and 151 against, resulting in a majority of 7. This motion indicated that the House would proceed with the abolition of slavery and go into committee to further deliberate the details of the legislation.

Interpretation This called for the House to resolve into committee to work on legislation for abolition. Prominent abolitionists voted NO. Gross (1980) notes that Buxton was on the losing side of this vote. So voting no is associated with being pro-abolition. The motion passed, and so the minority list is for the NOES.

C.3 July 25 1833

The debate on July 25, 1833, primarily revolves around amendments to the clauses concerning the apprenticeship period for slaves in the British colonies. The key motion that was passed in this debate includes the following points:

1. **Apprenticeship Termination Date**: The amendment proposed by Mr. Secretary Stanley, which suggests a specific date for the termination of the apprenticeship period, was agreed upon. The date set for the end of the apprenticeship of predial slaves (those working in agriculture) was filled in as June 1, 1840.

2. **Approval of Clauses**: Several clauses concerning the apprenticeship system were agreed to after amendments and discussions. This includes clause 6, which outlines the terms and conditions for the apprenticeship period.

3. **Rejection of Amendment by Lord Howick**: An amendment proposed by Lord Howick to reduce the term of apprenticeship for non-predial slaves (household slaves) from June 1838 to August 1834 was negatived.

Overall, the session involved significant discussions on the specifics of the apprenticeship system, with a focus on ensuring a gradual and regulated transition from slavery to freedom, culminating in the agreement on a fixed termination date for the apprenticeship

of predial slaves.

The original motion in the debate on 25 July 1833 was to fill up the blank in the first clause of the Abolition of Slavery Bill to reduce the compulsory labor of slaves to ten hours a day or sixty hours a week, effective from November 1, 1833. This motion was proposed by Mr. Secretary Stanley.

Interpretation The vote for which information is recorded is not the original motion, but the clause that set up apprenticeship. Voting No was consistent with the rejection of apprenticeship. The clause was rejected and so the minority list is for the NOES.

C.4   July 31 1833 (a, b)

First part

On 31 July 1833, the House of Commons went into Committee to discuss the Abolition of Slavery Bill. The debate focused on Clause 25, which proposed granting the Treasury the power to allocate £20 million for compensating slave owners without requiring further parliamentary approval.

Key Points Discussed:

1. **Mr. Herries' Objection**: He criticized the unprecedented nature of allowing the Treasury to grant such a large sum without parliamentary oversight and suggested issuing Exchequer bills instead.

2. **Lord Althorp's Defense**: He acknowledged the unusual nature of the proposal but argued it was necessary due to the uncertain timing of the required payments, which depended on colonies adopting abolition regulations.

3. **Mr. Baring's Suggestion**: He proposed compensating slave owners with government stock bearing interest, instead of immediate cash payments, to avoid financial instability.

4. **Mr. Aglionby's Concerns**: He argued that the proposed compensation was excessive and advocated for a more detailed assessment of actual losses before granting such a large sum.

5. *Sir Robert Peel's Stance**: He supported the £20 million grant based on prior parliamentary resolutions and the need to uphold the commitment made to slave owners.

6. **Mr. O'Connell's Opposition**: He opposed the grant, considering it unnecessary

and burdensome to the already heavily taxed English public.

7. **Mr. Cobbett's Argument**: He argued against compensating slave owners, questioning the legitimacy of considering slaves as property and criticizing the financial burden on the English people.

8. **Mr. Henry Hundley's View**: He suggested that with the introduction of the apprenticeship clause, which mitigated planters' losses, a smaller compensation might suffice.

The debate concluded with a division on an amendment to reconsider the grant, which was rejected. A subsequent vote confirmed the insertion of "twenty millions" in the clause, despite significant opposition.

Interpretation: The vote for which information is available was about writing the total of £20m to be given out in compensation, reducing flexibility around this amount. Opposed by many who did not think the money should be spent in this way. Have the list of NOES, which is indicative of anti slave-owner feeling.

Second part

The original motion in the debate on July 31, 1833, was primarily concerned with the terms of compensation to be provided to West-India proprietors in the context of the abolition of slavery. Specifically, it proposed that half of the compensation fund should be reserved until the period of apprenticeship expired. This measure was suggested to ensure that the planters fulfilled their part of the contract regarding the emancipation of slaves.

Mr. Fowell Buxton argued for this proposition, stressing the need for caution and prudence, drawing parallels with ordinary transactions where payment is withheld until the commodity is delivered. He expressed doubts about the planters' ability and intention to fulfill their obligations based on their past conduct and attitudes. He suggested that placing the remaining compensation in the hands of trustees would provide a safeguard, ensuring the completion of the emancipation process.

Mr. Secretary Stanley and Dr. Lushington responded to this motion, with Stanley opposing it due to concerns about its fairness and practicality, and Lushington supporting the need for some form of security to ensure the planters' compliance.

The motion concluded with an amendment specifying that no more than half of the 20 million pounds compensation should be paid until the term of apprenticeship had expired, either naturally or through the voluntary actions of the masters, providing an incentive

for an earlier end to the apprenticeship period.

Interpretation: Supporting this was pro-abolition since it was intended as way to ensure that apprenticeship was brought to an end. The amendment was rejected. The minority list is for the AYES, which is of people who supported abolition.

D   Earlier parliamentary votes

D.1   John Smith (11 June 1824)

The document "debate - 11 June 1824.docx" is a detailed record of a parliamentary debate in the House of Commons regarding the trial and condemnation of Reverend John Smith, a missionary in the colony of Demerara (now part of Guyana). The debate focuses on a motion presented by Mr. Brougham concerning the perceived injustice and violation of law in Smith's trial, which culminated in his conviction by a colonial court-martial.

Key points from the debate include:

1. **Motion Details**: The motion urges the House to present an address to the King, expressing alarm and sorrow over the injustice observed in Smith's trial and seeking the King's intervention to ensure a just and humane administration of law in Demerara.

2. **Dr. Lushington's Speech**: - **Defense of Smith**: Dr. Lushington defends Smith against the charges, emphasizing that the evidence against him was flawed and primarily based on testimonies of enslaved individuals who were themselves accomplices in the revolt. - **Critique of Trial**: Lushington argues that the court-martial ignored legal principles and procedural fairness, thus undermining the legitimacy of the conviction. - **Smith's Innocence**: He asserts Smith's innocence, both legally and morally, by dissecting the charges and the evidence. He highlights that Smith was accused of creating dissatisfaction among slaves, concealing the intended revolt, and corresponding with rebel leaders but finds no substantial proof of these allegations. - **Negro Evidence**: He criticizes the reliance on testimonies from enslaved people, who were considered unreliable by the colonial legal standards and were under duress, thereby questioning the validity of the evidence used against Smith.

3. **Charges Against Smith**: The specific accusations included: - Creating dissatisfaction among slaves. - Concealing knowledge of an intended revolt. - Corresponding

with rebel leaders during the revolt.

4. **Context of the Revolt**: - The debate provides a timeline of events leading to Smith's arrest and trial, noting that Governor Murray's circular on worship regulations and the subsequent dissatisfaction among slaves played a role in the unrest. - Smith's interactions with the slaves shortly before the revolt are scrutinized, particularly a conversation on August 17th, where slaves allegedly discussed the revolt with Smith.

5. **General Observations**: - The debate highlights broader issues of justice in the colonies, particularly regarding the treatment of missionaries and the enslaved population. - The discussion reflects contemporary concerns about colonial governance and the protection of rights for all subjects of the British Empire.

In essence, the document captures a significant moment in British parliamentary history where issues of colonial justice, missionary activities, and the rights of enslaved people were fervently debated.

Interpretation: Yes is in support of improving the conditions of the slaves (and so pro-slaves). Closing debate to discuss the motion, voting yes indicates support for improving the rights of the slaves. The vote failed and so the minority list shows the AYES.

D.2 Slave trials (1 March 1826)

The document contains the transcript of a debate in the House of Commons on March 1, 1826, regarding the trials and executions of several slaves in Jamaica in December 1823. Mr. Denman presents a motion to the House, criticizing the judicial process that led to the execution of eight individuals accused of conspiring to start an insurrection. He argues that the trials were unfair, with convictions based on weak and dubious evidence, primarily the testimony of a young boy trying to avoid punishment and unsupported accusations by other coerced witnesses.

Key points discussed in the document:

1. **Mr. Denman's Introduction**: He emphasizes the importance of the issue despite the House's preoccupation with other matters like commercial distress and currency issues. He argues that the House has a responsibility to address the judicial oppression in Jamaica.

*2. **Origin of the Accusations**: The supposed conspiracy was based on an overheard conversation between a slave named William Stirling and his master. The boy claimed to have heard about a planned uprising from his father, which led to the arrest and quick trial of eight individuals.*

*3. **Trial and Evidence**: The evidence against the accused was flimsy, primarily relying on the boy's inconsistent testimony. There was no thorough investigation or proper judicial procedure followed. The accused were tried and sentenced to death within days.*

*4. **Individual Cases**: Mr. Denman highlights specific cases, such as that of James Sterling, who was convicted based on his son's dubious testimony, and Henry Nibbs, who was convicted based on his wife's testimony. He points out the inconsistencies and lack of proper legal proceedings in these cases.*

*5. **Criticism of the Authorities**: The document criticizes the actions of Colonel Cox and other authorities for rushing the trials and executions to serve as a deterrent, rather than seeking justice. Correspondence from Colonel Cox indicates a predetermined intention to convict and execute the accused as a warning to others.*

*6. **Call for Action**: Mr. Denman calls for the House to intervene and prevent future miscarriages of justice in Jamaica. He urges for reforms to ensure fair trials and proper legal representation for the accused.*

The debate underscores the issues of judicial injustice and the brutal treatment of slaves in the British colonies, highlighting the need for systemic reforms and the protection of basic human rights.

Interpretation: Denman's motion is pro-abolition (ot at the very least pro-slave). It fails and so the minority list is for the AYES. That is, the list includes the people who supported better conditions for the slaves.

E   Data sources and variable construction

E.1   Voting for abolition

E.2   Exposure to revolts

E.3   Controls

Explain how they are created: they are weighted.

F   Instrumental variable estimates

Table A1: 2SLS: Reduced form

Dependent Variable:	Votes (binary)
Model:	(1)
Variables	
ln owners' exposure ruggedness (IV)	0.1023*
	(0.0510)
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	0.0194
	(0.0137)
ln petitions, 1823-32	0.0017
	(0.0045)
owners	-0.0038
	(0.0024)
Fixed-effects	
new constituency	Yes
county	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes
Fit statistics	
Observations	192
R^2	0.31908
Within R^2	0.05056

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

G   Additional information on Jamaica

Slave sales (volume)

H   Robustness

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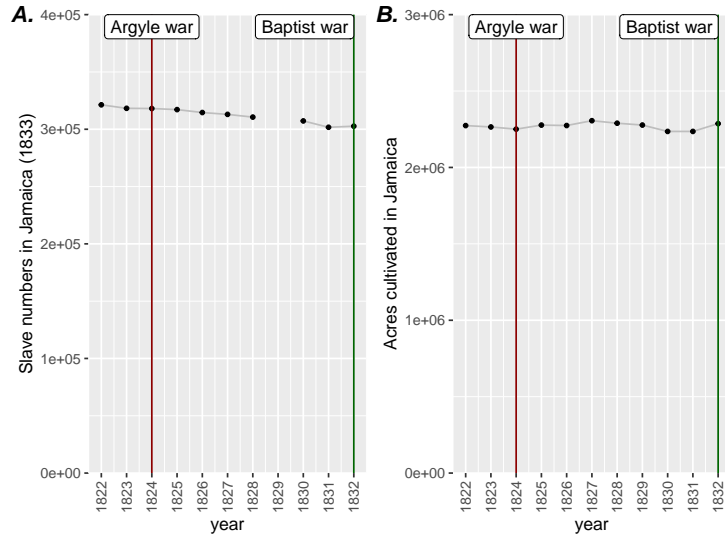
FIGURE A3: Slaves and acres cultivated in Jamaica

Table A2: MPs as the unit of analysis

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.0945$^+$	
	(0.0490)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.0998*
		(0.0486)
const_owner_sugar_change	-0.0044	-0.0047
	(0.0063)	(0.0062)
ln_petitions_total	-0.0027	-0.0029
	(0.0032)	(0.0032)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	320	320
R^2	0.21679	0.21823
Within R^2	0.01561	0.01741

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

Table A3: Drop (i) London, drop (ii) Bristol and Liverpool

Dependent Variable:			Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Variables				
ln_const_owner_affected	0.1183[+]		0.1348[*]	
	(0.0713)		(0.0671)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.1221[+]		0.1374[*]
		(0.0704)		(0.0664)
const_owner_sugar_change	0.0085	0.0082	-0.0041	-0.0042
	(0.0115)	(0.0114)	(0.0111)	(0.0111)
ln_petitions_total	0.0013	0.0012	0.0019	0.0018
	(0.0048)	(0.0048)	(0.0048)	(0.0048)
Fixed-effects				
new	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics				
Observations	188	188	190	190
R^2	0.32458	0.32582	0.31672	0.31780
Within R^2	0.05721	0.05894	0.04444	0.04595
Sample				
	No London	No London	No Liverpool, Bristol	No Liverpool, Bristol

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

Table A4: Only Jamaica holdings (other holdings / owners are dropped)

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.2255[**]	
	(0.0717)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.2255[**]
		(0.0717)
const_owner_sugar_change	0.0689[+]	0.0689[+]
	(0.0363)	(0.0363)
ln_petitions_total	0.0006	0.0006
	(0.0044)	(0.0044)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.33384	0.33384
Within R^2	0.07052	0.07052
Sample		
	Only Jamaica	Only Jamaica

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

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Table A5: Drop Jamaica holdings (only other holdings / owners are kept)

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.1197	
	(0.0770)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.1457[+]
		(0.0788)
const_owner_sugar_change	-0.0042	-0.0056
	(0.0081)	(0.0079)
ln_petitions_total	0.0024	0.0020
	(0.0044)	(0.0044)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.30442	0.30943
Within R^2	0.02632	0.03334
Sample		
	No Jamaica	No Jamaica

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

Table A6: Keep only owners with large value of slaves (>£500)

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.1244[+]	
	(0.0705)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.1257[+]
		(0.0700)
const_owner_sugar_change	-0.0038	-0.0038
	(0.0113)	(0.0112)
ln_petitions_total	0.0012	0.0012
	(0.0046)	(0.0046)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.30956	0.30993
Within R^2	0.03707	0.03758
Sample		
	> 500	> 500

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*

Table A7: Keep only owners with small value of slaves (<£500)

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.1566*	
	(0.0780)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.1658*
		(0.0771)
const_owner_sugar_change	-0.0111	-0.0123
	(0.0236)	(0.0235)
ln_petitions_total	0.0019	0.0017
	(0.0044)	(0.0044)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.32213	0.32468
Within R^2	0.03710	0.04074
Sample		
	< 500	< 500

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

Table A8: Include only claims that were eventually successful

Dependent Variable:	Votesb	
Model:	(1)	(2)
Variables		
ln_const_owner_affected	0.1214+	
	(0.0704)	
ln_const_owner_exposure_in_revolts_colonies		0.1220+
		(0.0691)
const_owner_sugar_change	-0.0032	-0.0031
	(0.0116)	(0.0115)
ln_petitions_total	0.0019	0.0018
	(0.0044)	(0.0045)
Fixed-effects		
new	Yes	Yes
slaves_bin	Yes	Yes
County	Yes	Yes
direct_owner	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics		
Observations	192	192
R^2	0.31016	0.31074
Within R^2	0.03550	0.03630
Sample		
	successful claims	successful claims

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1

Table A9: Slave revolts and petitions for abolition (cross-section)

Dependent Variables:	log petitions for abolition		Votes (binary)
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)
Variables			
ln owners affected	0.2431**		
	(0.0780)		
ln owners' exposure		0.2437**	
		(0.0761)	
change in sugar exports, 1826-31	-0.0153	-0.0153	0.0232+
	(0.0238)	(0.0236)	(0.0134)
owners	3.9×10^{-5}	4.6×10^{-5}	-0.0029
	(0.0037)	(0.0037)	(0.0027)
log petitions for abolition			0.0746
			(0.0687)
Fixed-effects			
new constituency	Yes	Yes	Yes
county	Yes	Yes	Yes
MP owned slaves	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics			
Observations	192	192	192
R^2	0.43443	0.43505	0.29786
Within R^2	0.07388	0.07490	0.02097

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, +: 0.1*