

The Growth of Government and Democracy in America, 1790-1860: Theory and History  
from an Economic Perspective

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By

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## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my grandmother Eileen Horpedahl, and to the memory of my grandparents Arnold Horpedahl, Marg Ree Zidon, and Frank Zidon.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, 1790-1860: THEORY AND HISTORY FROM AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Democracy emerged in the early nineteenth century United States on a very broad scale for the first time in history. This happened despite the fact that most states had strict property-based voting restrictions following the American Revolution. Why did those in power give up some of this power by extending voting rights? How much did government grow after democratization? My research tries to present some answers to these and related questions for the United States during the time period 1790-1860.

The first chapter presents a new conceptual framework for understanding expansions of the voting franchise in terms mutually beneficial exchanges and integrates this idea with other theories of democratization. The second chapter examines the growth of state governments in the U.S. between the ratification of the Constitution and the Civil War. The high degree of variability among the states, in terms of both the size and scope of

government, is presented as a puzzle based on existing theories of government growth. The third chapter attempts a partial resolution of this puzzle by studying state-level suffrage changes in historical detail, using the conceptual framework developed in the first chapter.

## Chapter 1: Emergent Democracy and the Constrained State

### 1.1 Introduction

Expansion of the voting franchise is an important component in the emergence of modern democracy, and one that is frequently studied by historians and other social scientists. Most previous studies examine specific historical cases or lay out specific paths through which democratization (expansion of the franchise) may occur. In contrast, I attempt to develop a general framework for understanding various paths that democratization<sup>1</sup> may occur.

This chapter has two main purposes. The first is to examine an alternative democratization path to those described in the literature: mutually beneficial political exchanges. This political exchange framework is integrated with existing theories of democratization, in order to develop a general explanation of voting franchise expansion. In other words, this chapter addresses the question, why would the group in power choose to extend power to other individuals?

In addition to explaining the expansion of democracy, the second goal of this paper is to examine the policy implications of the expansion of democracy. Most theories assume that a more inclusive electorate will lead, almost automatically, to a government

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<sup>1</sup> Democratization is sometimes used to describe transitions from autocracy to democracy, or simply an expansion of democracy. To be clear, my work does not address the transition from autocracy to democracy. Instead, I focus on the expansion of the electorate in an existing democracy, though the logic behind these two transitions may be quite similar.

that is larger in size and scope. My democratization framework shows how this may not always be the case, depending on the conditions under which the democratization takes place.

The alternative path described in this chapter can be described as mutually beneficial political exchange. It can also be referred to as emergent democracy. Rather than new voting rights or privileges being imposed from the outside or simply handed out, they emerge as part of a process of political exchange between individuals. Some of these individuals are acting from within the polity, while others have been previously excluded. Democratization can be seen as the process of including these individuals in the polity. The political exchange over democracy takes place because, like economic exchange, both sides view themselves as benefitting from the exchange.

Because the voting franchise is received as a part of an exchange, it will be useful to refer to a voting privilege, as distinct from a voting right. I define a voting privilege as conditional, meaning that the privilege can be revoked. The conditions of the privilege may either be positive (e.g., requirement to perform specific services) or negative (e.g., prohibition from using the privilege in certain ways), but the overarching condition is that the privilege is revocable. In contrast, a voting right is viewed by both parties to the exchange as irrevocable, with no duties or conditions attached. This language may also be used by the parties engaged in the transaction, though it need not be. The importance of this distinction will become clearer when the policy consequences of democratization are discussed. The policy consequences are, in short, that the extension of voting

privileges leads to a more constrained, less redistributive state than the extension of voting rights.

## **1.2 Existing Frameworks for Understanding Democratization**

In this section I describe a variety of existing explanations for the expansion of democracy within a polity. My goal here is not to present these explanations as inferior to the one I offer. In fact, each of these theories can do a reasonable job of explaining different historical cases. While the explanations are not mutually exclusive strictly speaking, in each case one explanation is likely to dominate. The nature of the democratic transition has important implications for the resulting political equilibrium, which in turn affects public policy.

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

### *Ideological Explanations*

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

The non-rational label does not indicate that the actions are irrational, but only that they cannot be explained by a standard, strong rational choice framework, where actors are maximizing pecuniary utility. Instead, under the ideological expansions of the franchise the group in power is influenced by arguments, such as those of the Enlightenment, about the basic rights of individuals in society. While this method of democratic transition is not usually spelled out formally, I view it as implicit in many historical works on suffrage transitions.<sup>2</sup> More explicit formulations of an ideological theory of suffrage expansion, stressing other-regarding behavior and reciprocity, can be found in Elster (1989), Goodin (1992), and Cohen (1997).

Ideological democratizations are a clear example of the recognition of democracy as a right, rather than a privilege. Precisely why this change of mind among the enfranchised class occurs is not always the same, but often it is a result of intellectual movements

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of the U.S. in the early nineteenth century, such works include Porter (1918), Williamson (1960), Chutte (1969), Keyssar (2000), and Wilentz (2005), though some of Keyssar’s analysis can be interpreted as describing political exchange (see Johnson 2005).

within a country arguing for such an expansion of rights. Regardless of how the enfranchised class (or their political representatives) is convinced that this denial is violation of natural rights, they are convinced, and take steps to correct the error. Once the new voting right has been granted, revocation is unlikely, barring a reversion of the previous change of mind about voting as a natural right.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, these ideological suffrage transitions contain no political bargain between the enfranchised and disenfranchised groups, making redistribution following democratization a real possibility.

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

### *Revolutionary Threats*

Suffrage changes can also occur under condition of revolutionary threat from a disenfranchised group. Recent works using a revolutionary threat model include Acemoglu and Robinson (2000, 2006), Boix (2003), and Conley and Temimi (2001).<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the revocation of previously granted voting rights may lead us to call into question whether the original granting was motivated by ideological concerns.

<sup>4</sup> The applicability of this model has been challenged in the context of the U.S. (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005) and Britain (Lizzeri and Persico 2004). Also, from a theoretical perspective, the costs of forcibly obtaining the franchise through revolution are often too high to serve as the driving force, due to either collective action problems or uncertainty about the outcome (Tullock 1971).

this case, the influence on the enfranchised group is not eloquent arguments about the natural rights, but instead comes from the barrel of a gun. It is in the material interest of those in power to expand the franchise, but the process can hardly be described as voluntary.

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

The lack of a voluntary bargain for the democratic change implies that “anything goes” in the subsequent political process. If democratization is the result of a change in ideology regarding who has the right to vote, it would be inconsistent to limit what is done with that right. If democratization is the result of a revolutionary threat, it is unlikely that any new institutional arrangements will be put in place to constrain democratic outcomes, even if the transition can be described as a bargain in some sense. When the newly enfranchised class has a lower average income than the previously enfranchised group (as is often the case, especially with economic restrictions on the franchise), the redistributive results predicted by Meltzer and Richard (1981) are likely to occur.

### *Political Competition*

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

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

Llavador and Oxoby (2005) also use a divided elite in their model of democratization. They describe democratic expansions because of competition among elites for different economic policies. The elites are assumed to be divided along sectoral lines, e.g. a land-owning elite and an industrial elite. The industrial elite will support

expanding the franchise, with the new electorate supporting policies that will enhance economic growth in the industrial sector. The land-owning elite is assumed to favor the status quo, as this benefits them in a material sense. More broadly, the party in power will support expanding the franchise to specific groups intended to increase the party's vote share.

### *Interstate Competition*

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

Engerman and Sokoloff (2005) describe a situation of political competition in the early United States. They emphasize the "frontier theory" of Turner (1906, 1920), as states on the frontier had universal suffrage before most of the original colonies. Since frontier states faced a scarcity of labor, they needed to attract new migrants and offering voting rights was one way of doing so. Also, the relative income equality in the frontier states made the broad suffrage requirements easier to implement. For non-frontier states, Engerman and Sokoloff allude to competition with or learning from frontier states. While this process does not involve any explicit bargains between parties, as long as the

interstate competition continues the states should remain constrained in their future activities.

### **1.3 Democratization within a Political Exchange Framework**

The alternative framework I present can be described as political exchange, fitting within the public choice tradition that begins with Buchanan and Tullock (1962). The key impetus for expanding democracy in this framework is the demand for publicly-provided goods. Voting rights are used as part of a political bargain to induce individuals to contribute to the polity, either directly (e.g., by serving in the militia) or indirectly by paying taxes which will fund various public goods. The bargain is mutually beneficial, and is viewed this way by both parties. The newly enfranchised group receives voting rights and the previously enfranchised group receiving the benefits which come from the public goods and services provided.

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

If the voting franchise is demanded for attributes which the current political class does not value, this differential in perceived value allows for political exchange. In other words, it is possible for the political class to give other citizens something of value at no

cost to themselves. This possibility arises primarily if citizens value the vote for its own sake, for instance, as a badge of citizenship in the community. (The reasons an individual may value the vote are examined in detail in a later section.) While this sounds similar to the ideological theory described above, it is distinct because the ideology is on the demand side of the voting rights equation. This distinction is crucial because voluntary political bargains are possible, unlike when the ideological value is on the supply side of the democratic exchange.

While my emphasis is on the demand for collectively consumed goods as being crucial for suffrage expansion, demand for increased tax revenue can produce similar results. If most existing sources of tax revenue, such as land or excise taxes, are already being optimally exploited, it is difficult to increase state revenues in the absence of modern tax-collecting bureaucracies. Thus, polities may offer political participation in exchange for payment of taxes. These taxes may take the form of poll taxes, but it could be payment of local taxes or other taxes already in place for which collection was difficult. Schumpeter (1975: 198) is generally correct in his rejection of the analogy that the state is a club and taxes are the club dues. However this form of political exchange for tax payment comes very close to approximating the analogy.<sup>5</sup>

### *Predicting Democratic Expansion*

In order to be useful, the framework should be able to predict when political exchange and franchise expansion will occur. At the very least, it should tell us under what circumstances political exchange is likely to occur, even if other theories are needed

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<sup>5</sup> Suffrage based on payment of taxes is discussed in Bates and Lien (1985), Barzel (2000), and Barzel and Kiser (1997, 2002) in both theoretical and historical contexts.

to explain the full record of franchise expansions. For example, as discussed below in Chapter 3, franchise expansions in the U.S. happened in some states as early as the 1790s but not until the 1850s in other states. Why the lag of half a century between different states?

In the political exchange framework the demand for public goods by enfranchised citizens serves as the primary impetus for extending the franchise to other individuals. The exchange is made possible by the demand for voting rights from these other individuals, who in turn provide (or continue providing) various services that are collectively consumed. Assuming that the demand for voting rights is constant over time, we can focus on changes in the demand for public goods<sup>6</sup>. It is useful to frame the discussion within the context defensive services as were provided by the militia in the early United States, although the framework is applicable to a variety of goods and services. The sketch of historical details presented here is expanded in the chapters that follow.

Changes in demand for militia services in a given state come about from several sources, primarily related to threats faced by a state and individuals within the states. One broad category of threats was those faced by frontier states: from foreign nations, the native population, as well as the generally lawless nature of the frontier society. New states were nearly always frontier states when they joined the union, but several of the original states were essentially on the frontier before the westward expansion began. Threats from foreign nations are not confined to frontier states, since nearly all of the

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<sup>6</sup> This assumption is relaxed later, when the demand for democracy will be treated as some function of income or wealth.

original states also possessed an ocean border. Southern states also faced a constant internal threat from the large African population that they enslaved, though there was variation in the magnitude of this threat across Southern states. Additionally, the threat to a state may come from the citizens themselves as in the revolutionary threat model described above.

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

### *Credible Threats*

The connection between democratizing and providing public goods can be viewed as a standard prisoner’s dilemma. The socially optimal result is for the enfranchised class to extend the franchise, and the previously disenfranchised class to provide a valuable service while not voting for redistribution. Extending the franchise also implicitly entails not preying on the newly enfranchised class. However in a finitely repeated scenario,

each party has the incentive to defect, with the result being a restricted franchise and weak provision of public goods. While infinitely repeated play may sustain cooperation it is by no means guaranteed, as per the folk theorem. Alternatively, cooperation can be sustained by the existence of credible threats and commitments.

A major threat that exists from the group granting suffrage rights is the threat of taking away the franchise if the contract is violated (e.g., by not fully providing the public good or redistributing wealth). This threat is credible if it has been exercised in the recent past. For example, North and Weingast (1989) list the previous depositions of monarchs as one of two key factors that made the post-Glorious Revolution institutions self-enforcing.<sup>7</sup> In the Early American Republic, the retraction of voting rights occurred in most states for a variety social groups, which are detailed further in the Chapter 3. These retractions often occurred simultaneously with expansions of the franchise, e.g., in New Jersey in 1807 voting rights were taken away from property-holding women and blacks while they were granted to tax-paying white men.

By making these credible threats to revoke the franchise, those in the power can have a reasonable assurance that the political exchange will actually be mutually beneficial. To use the language introduced earlier, if both parties view the voting franchise as a privilege, rather than a right, its extension becomes more likely. And furthermore, the extension is more likely to be permanent if the exchange ends up being mutually beneficial. While the language of rights versus privileges is important, more important is the ideology that is actually behind these words. Simply calling something a

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<sup>7</sup> Contrary to North and Weingast, I argue that extending the franchise is itself not necessarily a credible commitment, especially since numerous historical examples of revoking suffrage rights can be found (including those I describe in the U.S. in Chapter 3).

right is no guarantee that it will not be later revoked, as history has shown countless times. More important is that both sides have some understanding of the bargain when it is entered into.

### *Collective Action*

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

As discussed further in the Chapter 3, the existence of the militia and the presence of war provided an opportunity for overcoming the problems of political organization.<sup>8</sup> Wartime experience operated through two channels to overcome collective action problems: by increasing the demand for protective services; and by lowering the cost of organization (militia members were already organized to fight in the war). Furthermore, the political class is less likely to extend the franchise to an unorganized group, as this presents uncertainty that the political bargain will be followed.

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<sup>8</sup> The connection between wars and franchise expansions throughout U.S. history has been noted by many authors, including Scarry (1991: 1304-1308), Porter (1994: 247), Keyssar (2000: xxi, 169-170), and Karlan (2003).

### *Policy Implications of Democratization*

As discussed above, the policy implications of expanding the franchise point in the direction of increased government spending, particularly spending with a strong redistributive character. In both theory and history, a broader electorate is often viewed as unleashing the unconstrained state. The logic can be found in Meltzer and Richard (1981), but it is quite simple and intuitive. When the newly enfranchised class has a lower average income than the existing electorate, they will use their new power to redistribute wealth from the group that granted them power. Since historically most franchise restrictions have disenfranchised the lower classes of society, this logic would be expected to play out. This logic also sets up the puzzle of why democratization occurs, since it will harm the present political class (addressed in various ways by the theories described above).

The political exchange framework outlined in this paper is unique among democratization theories in that government growth and redistribution does not necessarily follow a broadening of the electorate. The framework describes a path by which polities can become more inclusive, yet the size and scope of government activities can remain relatively unchanged. The fact that the franchise is granted for specific reasons, such as providing services, means that voting is more likely to be viewed by both parties as a privilege rather than a right. When viewed as a privilege, the potential for revoking the franchise is real. The revocation can be for failure to perform the services specified or for abusing the privilege in the eyes of the party that granted it, e.g., by voting for redistribution.

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

The policy implications, specifically for the growth of government, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

#### *The Value of a Vote*

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

A strong tradition of theory and research in public choice suggests that the instrumental value of a vote is very close to zero (Downs 1957, Riker and Ordeshook

1968). Because of this, the fact that people vote in political elections is often referred to as a paradox. Since the probability of casting a decisive vote is approximately zero, it follows that the act of voting is irrational (in the narrow sense) if any costs must be undertaken. Recognizing the fact that people do, in fact, engage in the act of voting, a variety of non-instrumental rationales have been proposed to resolve the paradox. Thus while the act of voting may not be rational in the sense of pecuniary rewards, it is possible to explain voting based on a more broadly-defined utility function.

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

One major reason that individuals would demand the political franchise is its relationship to citizenship. Being considered a citizen of a given community or polity is something for which individuals have a demand and may be willing to pay a high cost. Regardless of where this demand comes from, it seems to exist in some form, and the demand for citizenship is more than a vague feeling internalized from high school civics classes. Whether one is classified as a citizen can have significant legal and political

consequences. Historically various rights and privileges have been granted to citizens while denied to non-citizens. And importantly, there has also been a historical practice of legally equating citizenship with the franchise (Shklar 1991; Smith 1997). Thus if a demand for citizenship exists, a derived demand for the voting franchise may also exist.

Another reason that individuals may value the franchise beyond its instrumental value is suggested by Conley and Temimi (2001). While they present a model of enfranchisement based on a revolutionary threat, they also give reasons why individuals would value the franchise but not the vote. The primary reason is that individuals are often part of groups, such as religious or class-based groups, which have a common set of interests. If the suffrage expansion involves the enfranchisement of a large number of people from the individual's group, they will place a value on obtaining the franchise regardless of benefits from the act of voting.

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

#### **1.4 A General Economic Theory of Franchise Expansion**

Having outlined the various theories for understanding franchise expansion, in this section my aim is to discuss the relationships between these theories. In a sense, my goal

is to integrate the specific theories of franchise expansion into a general theory. Armed with a more general theory of the causes and consequences of franchise expansion, historical episodes should be easier to understand.

While the models summarized above describe different paths that democratization may take, some common elements can be identified. Most of these commonalities are economic in nature. A primary similarity is the degree of income inequality in a country. In general, a country with low levels of inequality is more likely to expand the franchise. Under these conditions, there will be less income to redistribute and thus less opposition to democratization. Another economic factor in several of the models is capital mobility. Like income inequality, the degree of capital mobility can influence the actions of those in power with respect to suffrage. When capital mobility is greater, opposition to democratization will once again be lower, since redistributive policies can be more easily avoided.

The broader literature on democracy contains several assumptions about economic factors as well. One broad claim, based on both theory and history, is that democracy is a normal good or perhaps even a luxury good, indicating that demand will increase as income does. This generalization, often referred to as Wagner's Law, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. There is some dispute in the literature over the magnitude of increasing income levels on democracy, but an effect seems to exist nonetheless. This assumption of democracy as a normal good serves as the starting point for my presentation of the general theory of suffrage expansion.

### *The Demand for Democracy*

Two assumptions, based on the above discussion, form the basis of my general explanation for franchise expansions: 1. some demand for democracy does exist; and 2. this demand is an increasing function of income. Several comments need to be made about income in this framework. First, the income that is important is the income of the disenfranchised members of society, not those that already possess the franchise. Thus, using an aggregated measure of per capita income for the entire country would not be appropriate.

Second, there is no specific level or range of income at which individuals will automatically demand the franchise. Instead, there is a tendency for democratic demands to increase as income does. Finally, although I take a methodological individualism perspective, it will be useful to speak of the average income of a subset of society. This follows from the fact that collective action is required in order to obtain the franchise, and we therefore must speak of groups in addition to individuals.

For purposes of illustration, I will outline a hypothetical situation of a state in which part of the population is enfranchised. In the initial time period, only one-quarter of the (adult) population has the privilege of voting, and they are also the wealthiest segment of society (Group A). Recent economic growth has generated rising income in the state, and another group (B) has reached an income level at which they now have a substantial demand for the franchise. Group B also composes one-quarter of the state's population.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> While I treat these groups as fixed in my analysis, it is important recognize that this may be an accurate portrayal. Individuals may move between Groups A and B (or the unmentioned other fifty percent of the population) provided that the franchise is based on a changeable attribute, such economic status, rather than an unchangeable one, such a particular demographic trait.

At this point members of B may begin to voice their demands to A through various means. They may even gain some sympathetic supporters in Group A, though not enough to extend the franchise quite yet.

The process of democratization may now take one of several paths. As noted above, part of the determination of which path is taken may be left to chance or circumstance, i.e., other factors in society which are on the surface unrelated to the process of democratization. An important factor is whether or not the disenfranchised class, Group B, is currently engaged in providing any goods or services which are collectively consumed (including by Group A).<sup>10</sup> Historical examples of such collective consumption goods are militia or other defensive services, voluntary service on the fire brigade, or laboring on the public roads. These goods all have some private characteristics in addition to the public ones, and individuals may be paid for the services. Nonetheless, if most members of Group B are involved in producing these services, they possess a crucial bargaining position in the suffrage debates.

Another factor is much more outside the control of members in either Group A or B: the presence of some exogenous shock which will increase the demand among Group A for the collective consumption good. An example of such a shock would be a threat of war with another country, increasing the demand for protective services. This shock to demand alone serves an important function in the theory, but it provides a second, perhaps equally important function. In order to better provide the service, individuals will typically need to be organized into groups and remain in close contact for a period of

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<sup>10</sup> I refrain from using the phrase “public good,” as it carries with it a specific definition in economics, and thus the phrase “collective-consumption goods” will be used instead.

time. By being placed in groups, the collective action is strongly mitigated, to the point where individuals in the group may now be able to engage in the political bargaining process.

If the conditions described here, provision of collective goods and an exogenous shock, are present at the time when demand for enfranchisement is sufficiently strong, the theory predicts democratization will occur. The democratization will take the path described in the above section, through the process of political exchange, with Group B gaining the privilege of voting on equal footing with Group A. However, it is crucial to ask, what if these conditions are not present when there is significant demand for democratization? Several different paths may be taken if this is the case, but the political exchange pattern is unlikely to be the path followed by such a society.

One path that may be followed at this point is the non-rational choice or ideological suffrage expansion. All that is required for this is that sufficient number of Group A members are convinced by the arguments of Group B or their advocates. If enough members of the legislature can be converted to the belief that this segment of society should possess the franchise as a natural right, this will be enough to enfranchise Group B. Of course, concerns may be raised about the other one-half of society,<sup>11</sup> thus far neglected in our discussion, and why they too are not endowed with this right. However, history has demonstrated that orators have no lack of imagination when it comes to reasons for denying rights to others, whether these are serious beliefs or not. The general

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<sup>11</sup> Recall that Group A and B each compose one-quarter of the adult population.

history trend is for different groups to be progressively enfranchised, until a situation approximating universal suffrage exists.

Since this ideological category of suffrage expansion has been labeled as non-rational choice, there may be some difficulty in identifying precisely how such a transition will occur. In fact, it may even be difficult to tell *ex ante* whether the arguments made were sincere or simply attempts to increase the support of a particular party or faction. Some of this confusion can be resolved by discussing another method of suffrage expansion: political competition. In the political competition path, the process of democratization takes roughly the same path as the ideological one, in that a majority of the legislature must be convinced to grant the voting franchise to Group B. But in this scenario, the goal of enfranchisement is specifically to increase political power.

How, in practice, can we distinguish between ideological and political-competition enfranchisements? Examining the debates over suffrage expansion can provide some clues, although we would not always expect complete honesty about intentions to increase political power. Two factors may be analyzed which, together, can be suggestive of which path was produced the franchise expansion. The first is whether support, in terms of votes or debate arguments, for franchise expansion comes exclusively from one party. The second is whether the party that supported the expansion actually increases their legislative power, in terms of legislative seats, in the next election. If both of these conditions do not exist in a given historical episode, we can rule out the political competition path with some degree of certainty. In the end though, this distinction is not

critical for policy determination, as neither path contains a bargain which will constrain future state actions.

Another path of democratization to consider is inter-state competition, where states use an inclusive polity as a means of attracting citizens from other states. This is a path which requires the presence of several exogenous factors in order to be effective. First there must be nearby polities that are similar in most respects, such that individuals will choose to migrate into the state with a broader franchise. While the franchise does have some value, as described above, this value is unlikely to be very large. Nevertheless, it may be enough to influence individuals at the margin. For such migration to even be possible, though, a second condition must be present: free migration must be permitted between the states. This may seem obvious from a theoretical perspective, but it is important to emphasize from a historical perspective since restrictions on movement of people has been quite common throughout history.

The possibility of franchise expansion by inter-state competition is contingent on one of the three above paths of democratization also occurring. History demonstrates that enfranchisement is likely to be for a specific group of citizens, e.g., adult white males, rather than simply new migrants. This means that enfranchisement from inter-state competition will occur simultaneously with either political exchange, ideological, or political competition transitions, since existing residents will also be enfranchised in an attempt to attract migrants. Because of this simultaneity of enfranchisement paths, whether or not a bargain exists to constrain future state activities depends upon which enfranchisement path is paired with the change to encourage migration.

The last path of enfranchisement to discuss is through internal revolution. This path is saved for last, since it is also the last chronologically, in the sense that it is likely to be followed if no other path is taken. Recalling that the demand for democracy is an increasing function of income, this demand will continue to increase while debates and proposals for the other paths take place (assuming that incomes continue to rise). After several years of rising income with no action on suffrage expansion, the demand may reach a level at which individuals are willing to take more costly actions to meet their demands. These demands may even take place outside of the official political channels, such as demonstrations and protests.

However, as with the political exchange path, collective action problems will tend to restrain any extreme organized measures for the time being. Furthermore, since there is no specific income level at which voting rights are demanded, revolutions can take an extended period of time to manifest. But when the disenfranchised individuals are presented with a situation in which they are organized for other purposes, they may take this opportunity to also express their demands for political change. A variety of situations can help to overcome the collective action problem, such as organizing men for war or other military activities.

Another possibility for achieving collective action should be stressed here, and that is the organizing forces which rising incomes may produce. The industrial revolution was characterized by the growth of large cities and economies of scale in factory size, which also helped the growth of labor unions. All of these factors have the characteristic of putting men into contact with one another, especially men who may not have done so

before. The importance of organized labor for many revolutionary democratic movements in Europe and Latin America (Collier 1999) fits nicely into this scheme, as well as that of Rhode Island (discussed in Chapter 3). If the collective action problem is solved through one of these channels, revolution or the threat of revolution is likely to occur, specifically with the demand that the group be enfranchised. This revolutionary means of democratization is also unlikely to result in any voluntary bargains to constrain future state activity.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

The possibility of politically powerful groups extending power to others in society should seem like less of a mystery after this discussion. As I have attempted to demonstrate, this process can in fact occur, and there are multiple paths which the process may take. It is extremely important to reemphasize one point: the path of democratization taken has definite implications for the public policies that follow. And based on the logic in my arguments, the only path which tends to ensure a constrained state is the political exchange method of enfranchisement (which can also be paired with inter-state competition). This is true because the political exchange method fits in with a rational choice framework, and it allows the various parties to the exchange to bargain in a non-coercive setting. Stated in a different form, when voting is viewed by all parties as a privilege, not a right, democracy can expand without having major redistributive consequences.

## Chapter 2: Government Growth in Antebellum America

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyzes in detail the policy consequences of expanding the voting franchise in the United States prior to the Civil War. The analysis is primarily quantitative in nature, but I also enlighten the formal analysis with historical narrative for particular states when it is warranted. A more detailed historical narrative is found in Chapter 3.

In a broad sense, this chapter examines the growth of government in the U.S. at the state level. The narrower question is whether or not policy changes followed democratization, and if so what kinds of policy changes followed. To this end, I distinguish between two kinds of policy change: size and scope of government activity. Size refers to the amount of spending on basic functions of government. Scope refers to the kind of activities the government is engaging in. Size and scope are both defined more precisely below.

To examine these questions, I use data on expenditures and taxation in U.S. states from the Sylla, Legler, and Wallis (1993) dataset on state and local finance. This dataset covers many states back to the late eighteenth century and offers detailed categorical breakdowns. By using these categories, I am able to distinguish between increases in the size and scope of the state.

In addition to the presentation of the data on spending and taxes, I use the framework developed in the previous chapter to offer an explanation of the growth in government. Doing so is necessary because there is large variance in the growth of government across states in this period, both in terms of size and scope. The history of franchise expansion is examined in much more detail in the following chapter, with an emphasis on the different paths to democratization taken by the states as influencing the policy changes that followed.

## **2.2 The Growth of Government: Theory and History**

### *The Broad Literature*

A classic theory in public finance on the growth of government is found in “Wagner’s Law of Expanding State Activity.” Formulated in the nineteenth century by German political economist Adolph Wagner, it is the widely observed phenomenon that government tends to grow over time and does so at a rate greater than personal income. The recent empirical literature is reviewed and criticized by Peacock and Scott (2000), and I make no attempt at a similar exercise here. Instead, it should be noted that the Law is more of an observation than a theory of precisely why we observe this regularity. And furthermore, as Wagner and Weber (1977) and others have pointed out, it is more of a tendency than a Law, since it does not hold for all countries at all times.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>12</sup> Wagner himself was much more careful in this regard, as Peacock and Scott (2000: 2-3) point out. The use of econometric tests for the Law also seems to lead to confusion about the interpretation of the results. For instance, Yousefi and Abizadeh (1992) look at the growth of government in U.S. states from 1950-85, showing that income elasticity of demand for public expenditures is greater than one (a formulation of the Law) for 21 of 30 randomly selected states. While an interesting observation, they then conclude that “Wagner’s law is confirmed.” It seems odd to claim that something is a law which does not hold for one-third of the cases observed.

taking Wagner's prediction/observation as a baseline, an interesting question is why it does not hold for certain cases.

Robert Higgs (1985, 1987) identifies a mechanism by which government growth can occur: wars and other social crises. Government quite obviously grows temporarily during wars and crises, but Higgs' insight is that following the crisis government will not shrink back to its previous size. While government will shrink following the crisis, it will ratchet up to a permanently higher plateau. Higgs applies this theory to the growth of the federal government in the U.S., primarily for the twentieth century. The theory does fit well with the history for the period analyzed, but we also need an explanation of why large government (compared to national income) did not emerge in earlier eras. Crises were certainly not new to the twentieth century, it is the political reaction that took a new form.

Randall Holcombe casts some doubt on Higgs' ratchet hypothesis (1993) and presents a broader theory of his own (2002), specifically that the movement from liberty to democracy has produced bigger government. By movements from liberty to democracy, Holcombe means any change in ideology about democracy or the expansion of democratic institutions to more areas. This view contrasts with the crisis view of Higgs, since, as Higgs himself notes, the ratchet phenomenon only occurs when there is also a change in ideology. Holcombe (2002) traces the various changes from liberty to democracy throughout U.S. history, but interestingly for my work he only mentions the extension of the voting franchise briefly. He does so a few times in broad terms (8, 246) and once in the context of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (240).

### *Franchise Changes and the Growth of Government*

While the above theories attempt to explain the growth of government in various ways, I now focus on a subset of government growth theories which emphasize the expansion of the franchise. In reality, there is one main theory in this area, and a variety of tests of the theory using historical data.

Meltzer and Richard (1981, 1983) provide a simple model to explain the growth of government, in which voters are both rational and self-interested. If new voters are included in the electorate, and these new voters have incomes below the median income, they will use their new voting power to redistribute income to themselves. Similarly, if income in society grows, there will be more of it to be redistributed, which is manifested through the political process.

Several papers have examined franchise expansions in the United States in different historical periods using the Meltzer-Richard framework, but the focus has been almost exclusively on the twentieth century. Husted and Kenny (1997) examine the removal of poll taxes and literacy tests in southern states during the mid-twentieth century. They find that the removal of these restrictions on suffrage increased the size of the electorate while making the median voter poorer. This resulted in an increase in redistributive state and local expenditures, but no change in non-redistributive spending, which is consistent with the Meltzer-Richard (1981) model. Lott and Kenny (1999) perform a similar analysis for women's suffrage in the early twentieth century and find similar results. In both of these studies, the change in voting rights is exogenous to policy for many states, since it was forcibly imposed by the federal government.

Democratization in Europe has also been studied for changes in policy following the expansion of the franchise. Justman and Gradstein (1999) examine the gradual expansion of male suffrage in Britain in the late nineteenth century, and find that it contributed to the growth of redistributive fiscal policies. Abrams and Settle (1999) look at Switzerland's granting of voting rights to women, which did not come until 1971. They also find confirmation of the Meltzer-Richard model, as women's suffrage in Switzerland was followed by significant increases in welfare spending.

In contrast to the above single country studies, Aidt, Dutta, and Loukoianova (2006) examine a panel of 12 Western European countries from 1830-1938. They find quite different results from the above papers on the United States. The expansion of the male franchise did lead to increased spending on public goods, but they find no increase in redistribution. This result is consistent with the predictions of the model in Lizzeri and Persico (2004). Aidt and Dallal (2008) use the same data as Aidt, et al. (2006) to focus on the expansion of voting rights to women. Here they do find an increase in social spending when women are enfranchised, consistent with the Meltzer-Richard prediction.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

Measuring the growth of government is an inherently difficult task. Robert Higgs has not only studied the growth of government in the U.S. extensively (1987), he has also detailed the many problems involved in trying to accurately measure the size of government (1991). The main error Higgs identifies, as I understand him, is that scholars tend to focus on one measure of government instead of a variety of measures. Furthermore, Higgs (1991: 33) claims that "one can describe a large part of the recent

research on the growth of government as attempts by researchers who neither know nor care much about history to discover laws of history.” My hope is that by using different measures of government (e.g., both size and scope) as well as a historical narrative in Chapter 3, I avoid completely falling into the trap Higgs describes.

The primary problem involves the choice of data or other evidence to demonstrate government growth. The dollar amount of government spending and taxation are a common metric, and they are the main type used in my analysis. However it is important to recognize that the measure is not perfect, even when put on a per capita, inflation-adjusted basis. Other measures are possible, such as the number of government employees, either in absolute terms or relative to private employment. Some important forms of government growth are difficult to even quantify, such as regulations, although we can count the number of regulations or estimate the dollar value of the regulatory burden.

The focus here is on the growth in government expenditures and taxation, on a per capita basis and adjusted for inflation.<sup>13</sup> Ideally the size of government should be compared to some measure of income, since as explained below we expect some government growth along with growing wealth. Unfortunately the only income statistics available for this era are for the nation as a whole (and even these are estimates that were constructed well after the fact).

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<sup>13</sup> Inflation adjustments will typically be in 1860 dollars using the David-Solar index from *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* (2000), Table Cc1-2, unless otherwise noted.

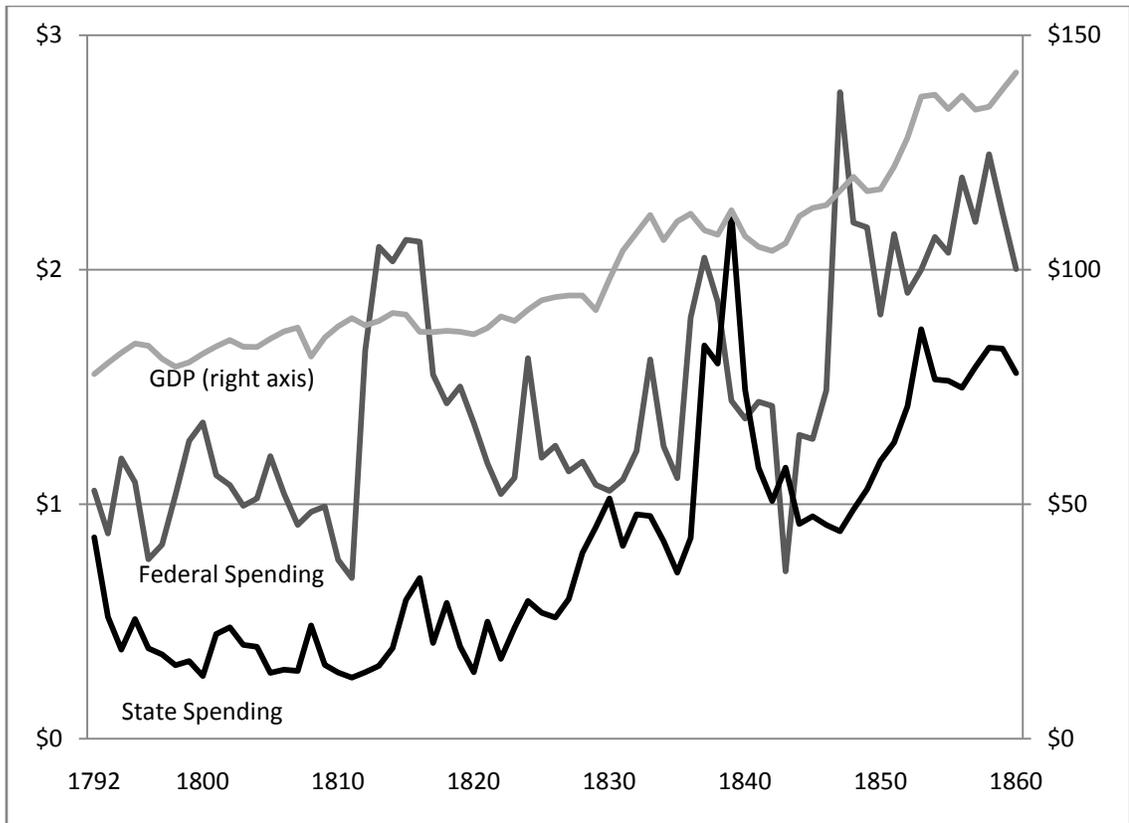
### *Overview of Government Growth Before the Civil War*

To properly assess the growth in state government spending, some baseline must be established for comparison. While comparing the states to each other is a useful method (which will be employed below), it is helpful to have other comparisons. Two such comparisons are the growth in federal spending and the growth in national income. If government is a normal good, we would expect it to grow along with the growth in income. This growth should show up in both federal and state spending alike. Figure 1 shows the growth of federal spending, state spending, and per capita income from 1792 to 1860. All dollar figures are per capita, in real 1860 dollars.<sup>14</sup> The major fact to be taken from Figure 1 is that these three measures all roughly doubled from 1792 to 1860: federal spending per capita from \$1.05 to \$2.00; state spending per capita \$0.86 to \$1.70; and GDP per capita<sup>15</sup> from \$78 to \$142.

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<sup>14</sup> The year 1792 is chosen as the starting point because this is the first full year in which federal spending is available. State expenditures from Sylla, Legler, and Wallis (1993); federal expenditures from *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* (2000), Table Ea636-643; annual national population estimates from *ibid.*, Table Aa6-8; state population from *ibid.*, Tables Aa2244-2340 through Aa6500-6550 (intercensal years are interpolated); GDP per capita from *ibid.*, Table Ca9-19, Series Ca11; inflation adjustment from *ibid.*, Table Cc1-2 (David-Solar-based series).

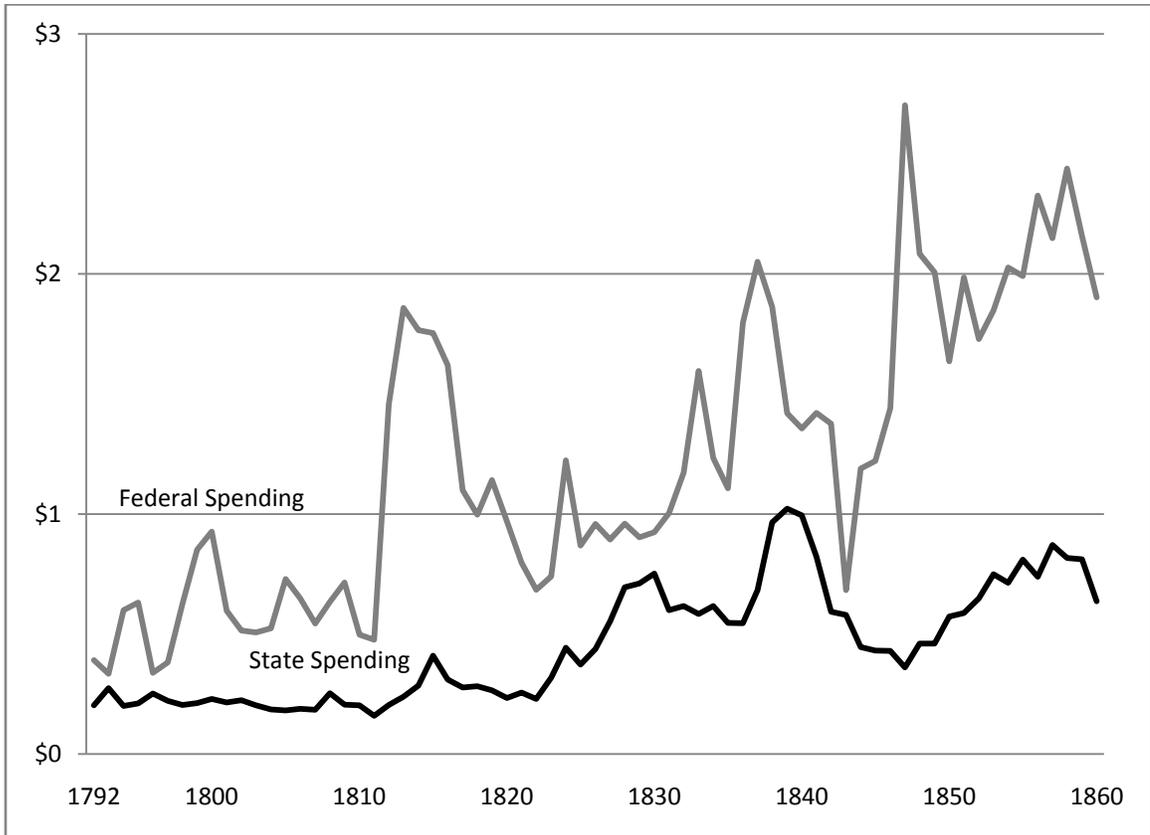
<sup>15</sup> This doubling of GDP per capita holds regardless of which series is used in *Historical Statistics*, Table Ca9-19.



**Figure 1: Federal Spending, State Spending, and GDP (1860 per capita dollars)**

Several items about this data should be emphasized. First, the state-level figures are combined for all states and then placed on a per capita basis (for states where data was available). There is considerable variation in growth rates across states, a fact which will be examined in detail below. Also, both federal and state expenditures include interest and debt repayment, which comprised the major proportion (around 60%) of spending in the first decade of the new republic. If interest, debt repayment, and related categories are excluded, the increase in spending is much more pronounced: close to five-fold for

federal and over three-fold for the states. Figure 2 shows the spending trends removing the interest-type categories.



**Figure 2: Federal and State Spending, minus Interest and Related Categories (1860 per capita dollars)**

Finally, it should be noted that local government spending is not included in my analysis due to lack of data coverage across both geography and time. This is unfortunate since local spending became an important layer of government towards the end of this

period and was the dominant form (in dollar terms) from the end of the Civil War through World War I (Wallis 2000; Holcombe and Lacombe 2001).

### *Data Description*

Government spending at the state level increased substantially in the antebellum period, though there was considerable variation across states. In the following chapter I attempt to explain this variation, and therefore the following discussion is intended to show the divergence among state spending patterns in a variety of ways.

Before proceeding, some remarks on the dataset itself are in order. The data is composed of several categorical breakdowns, and I will focus on six of those in my analysis. These six broad categories of government spending are: government administration; public safety; education; transportation; environmental and housing; and social services and welfare.<sup>16</sup> In the following discussion I refer to this group of six categories as “total spending.”

The order in which I have listed the six categories above is on a continuum from public goods to private goods.<sup>17</sup> Of course, no goods fit either end of the continuum exactly, and perhaps this is not even the ideal way to represent such goods. Nonetheless, the vast majority of economic work on government spending uses this public-private distinction, and I do as well since it is a useful heuristic.

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<sup>16</sup> The group of six spending categories excludes several areas of government spending: public service enterprises, insurance trust, interest, sinking funds and debt repayment, and spending not elsewhere classified in the dataset. These categories are excluded because either they were used by a small group of states (first two) or their redistributive character is not clear (last three). Ideally we would want to allocate interest and debt payments to the categories for which the debt was accrued, but a lack of data going back in time prevents such an exercise.

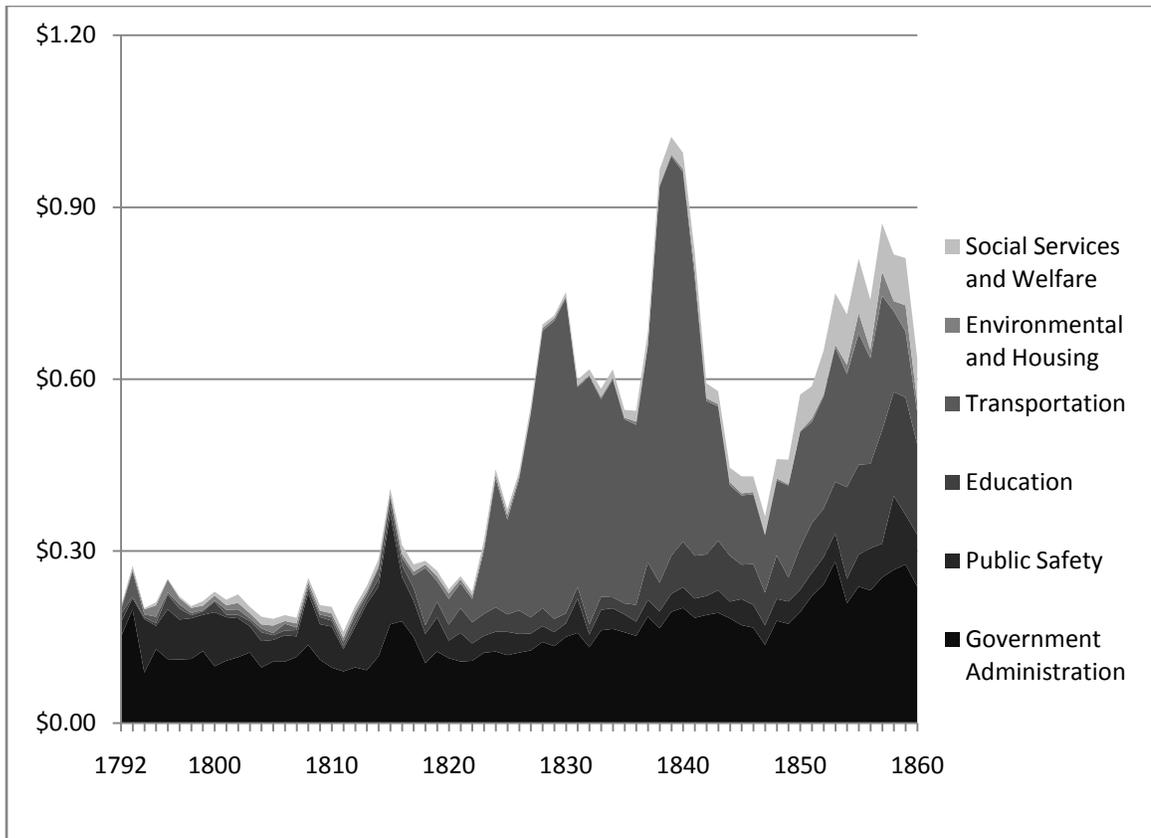
<sup>17</sup> The ordering I present is not to be taken as definitive. For instance, the order of transportation and environmental/housing could be reversed, especially for certain subcategories of the latter group such as sewerage and sanitation.

A subset of the total spending category is also used below. This subset consists of just two categories: government administration and public safety. These two categories can be referred to as “core spending,” and they are singled out because they are the closest to meeting the theoretical category of public goods. Public safety spending includes police and militia, while government administration spending includes courts and the legislature. The other four categories have some identifiable redistributive aspect due to being relatively closer to the private end of the public-private continuum.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 3 shows the changes over time in these six spending categories. Essentially, this takes the State Spending line from Figure 2 and give details on the composition of the expenditures. The categories are arranged along the public-private continuum described above, with the public goods (i.e., the “core spending” subset) starting at the bottom. The data once again is an aggregate of all the states, and as we move through time more states are included due to both states entering the union and increasing data availability. For example, in 1789 data is only available for one state, New York, with Virginia’s data being available the following year in 1790. Therefore, I start with 1792 for consistency with Figures 1 and 2.

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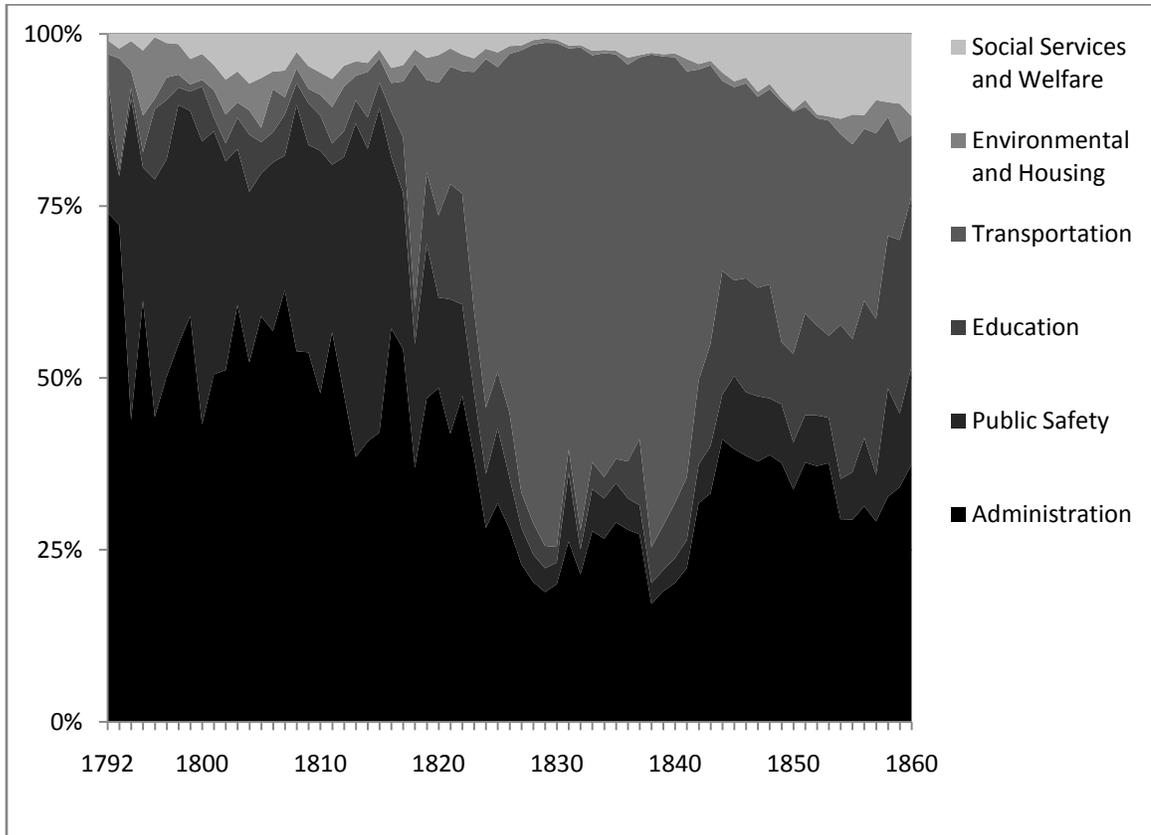
<sup>18</sup> Of course, all government spending has some redistributive character, in the sense that money is transferred from taxpayers to government employees. I make the distinction because it is useful to also identify whether spending promotes the general welfare or specific groups. That said, even public safety spending can benefit specific groups if it is targeted geographically, but viewed on a continuum this category comes closer to public good than others.



**Figure 3: State Expenditures for Six Categories (1860 per capita dollars)**

While the general trend of increased spending (in real, per capita terms) is clearly evident in Figure 3, most of the increase is due to expansion of government spending to new areas. Core spending increased over the period, ignoring the first five years or so when we have data for just a few states. But the big change is in the scope of government activity, especially expanding into the areas of education and transportation. The change was not as dramatic for all states, a fact which is discussed in great detail in the following subsection.

Figure 4 displays the same data, but shows the proportions of total spending instead of the dollar amounts.



**Figure 4: Proportion of State Expenditures for Six Categories (1860 per capita dollars)**

The spikes in state government spending, particularly in transportation spending, are quite evident in both of these Figures. Similar spikes will, of course, be observed in many other states when the data is disaggregated in Chapter 3, so a few comments are

warranted. As mentioned above, spending on transportation occupies a middle position between the idealized public and private goods. Thus while transportation has some redistributive aspect, in that it exists in a particular geographic location, there are certainly spillover benefits as well. These benefits are often reflected in the increased property values near the construction of the road or canal (or later railroads).

Many state governments came up with an innovative approach to financing these projects: benefit taxes, or Lindahl taxes (Wallis and Weingast 2005). This method of public finance attempts to finance a project by taxing those that are expected to benefit from it. In the case of public transportation and infrastructure, the beneficiaries would usually be those with adjacent property. Benefit taxes should not be seen as perfectly analogous to voluntary financing of investments, but they are certainly closer than general taxation. Not all states used this method though, as many also used taxless finance methods such as deficit financing.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Total and Core State Expenditures*

Table 1 displays state expenditures per capita for nine states beginning in 1805, using five-year averages, in comparison with 1860.<sup>20</sup> This means that the time periods being compared are 1805-1809 and 1856-1860, although for some years the data is

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<sup>19</sup> Wallis and Weingast (2005) list New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois as examples of states that used benefit taxation, and Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York (again, later in the era) as states that used deficit finance. It should also be noted that deficit financing can turn into general taxation of the investments to do not return dividends. This is not merely a theoretical possibility, as many states experienced this problem in the 1840s, leading them to modify their constitutions and substitute hard budget constraints for the previous taxless finance (Wallis 2005).

<sup>20</sup> There is nothing particularly special about the year 1805, other than that this is the first year in which data is available for nine states. And there is nothing particularly special about nine states, but data for ten states is not available until 1811. In any event, changing the starting year does not alter the results significantly.

missing in particular states. In cases of missing data, more years are used in order to obtain a five-year average.

The first three columns in Table 1 display spending for six broad categories which comprise “total spending.” The last three columns display government spending for the “core spending” subset.

**Table 1: Average Per Capita State Spending, 1805-1860 (in 1860 per capita dollars)**

	<u>Six Expenditure Categories</u>			<u>Public Safety and Admin.</u>		
	First 5 Years	Final 5 Years	Ratio	First 5 Years	Final 5 Years	Ratio
Virginia	\$0.22	\$0.45	2.0	\$0.21	\$0.25	1.2
Connecticut	\$0.21	\$0.49	2.3	\$0.15	\$0.45	2.9
Delaware	\$0.14	\$0.33	2.4	\$0.11	\$0.17	1.5
New York	\$0.24	\$0.63	2.6	\$0.17	\$0.33	1.9
New Hampshire	\$0.10	\$0.29	2.9	\$0.10	\$0.24	2.5
South Carolina	\$0.22	\$0.98	4.5	\$0.16	\$0.77	4.7
Pennsylvania	\$0.16	\$0.74	4.6	\$0.14	\$0.17	1.2
Vermont	\$0.12	\$0.55	4.6	\$0.12	\$0.50	4.3
Rhode Island	\$0.11	\$1.15	10.5	\$0.11	\$0.73	6.7
Average	\$0.17	\$0.62	3.7	\$0.14	\$0.40	2.8

In the initial five-year period, most states were spending around the average of 17 cents per person in total expenditures, and no state spent more than 25 cents. By the final five-year period, no state was spending less than this 25 cent amount, and most were spending substantially more. All states saw spending at least double over the period,

while on average per capita total spending quadrupled (or tripled if we throw out the outlier, Rhode Island).

While both total and core spending increased over the period, they did not do so in the same manner across states. Nearly all states witnessed a larger increase in total spending than core spending (Connecticut and South Carolina were the exceptions). In the first five-year period, core spending composed the vast majority of spending in all states. By the final five-year period, this was no longer true in all states. Table 2 shows this fact more clearly.

**Table 2: Ratio of Core to Total Spending, 1805-1860**

	First 5 Years	Final 5 Years
Virginia	0.96	0.55
Connecticut	0.73	0.92
Delaware	0.83	0.50
New York	0.70	0.52
New Hampshire	1.00	0.85
South Carolina	0.74	0.79
Pennsylvania	0.85	0.22
Vermont	0.98	0.92
Rhode Island	1.00	0.63
Average	0.86	0.66

The main fact to be taken away from Table 2 is that core spending as a percent of total spending decreased in nearly all states, again with Virginia and South Carolina the exceptions. The implication of this change is that a larger proportion of the state budgets

are being spent on non-core categories, i.e., those that have some redistributive character. Taken together, Tables 1 and 2 tell a general story about real per capita expenditures in the states prior to the Civil War: spending is increasing overall, and more of this spending is redistributive in nature.

The divergence among the states can be demonstrated in another way, by looking at the ratio of spending between the highest and the lowest states. This comparison is presented in Table 3, and it is presented in several ways by grouping the states differently. Regardless of how the states are grouped or how spending is grouped, the change between the initial five years and the final five years is quite clear: the divergence between state spending is more pronounced in the later time period.

**Table 3: Ratio of Highest to Lowest Spending States, 1805-1860**

	First 5 Years	Final 5 Years
Top 1 vs. Bottom 1		
Total Spending	2.5	4.0
Core Spending	2.2	4.7
Top 4 vs. Bottom 4		
Total Spending	2.0	2.2
Core Spending	1.6	3.0

Having established that there are clear differences in spending across states, especially in later time periods, the natural question is: Why? To begin answering this question, I now expand beyond the group of nine states to look at all states. The focus is

on the years just prior to the Civil War, which allows us to bring more states into the analysis. Table 4 displays per capita expenditures for all states, once again using five-year averages for 1856-1860 when available<sup>21</sup> and breaking down spending into total and core categories. The original states are indicated with boldface.

We can define a constrained state in one of two ways using this basic data. A relatively constrained state has low per capita spending when compared with other states. The ordering of states in Table 4 can be used for making this relative comparison. An absolutely constrained state is one that spends a large proportion of its budget on core state services. Since there is no hard rule for how much of the budget must be spent on core services, it is useful to also make a relative comparison for this approach. Finally, a third category may be identified, the temporally constrained state, which looks at growth over time (Table 1 is useful for evaluating this criterion). The definition of a “constrained state” that I use is somewhat unusual, in that it is typical to speak of the institutions that constrain a state. Instead, I am referring to the outcomes of those constraints, as they are manifested in the available data.

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<sup>21</sup> As in the previous tables, there were states with missing years of data, thus necessitating an expansion outside of the 1856-1860 timeframe. However, all states had at least five years of data between 1850 and 1860, with the exception of Alabama, Georgia, Maine, and Wisconsin. Two other states, Minnesota and Oregon, were not granted statehood until 1858 and 1859, thus they could not have 5 years of data in this period (their data is not available until after the Civil War anyway).

**Table 4: Average Per Capita Expenditures, Five Years Prior to Civil War**

	Total	Core	Ratio
<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>\$0.26</b>	<b>\$0.12</b>	<b>0.47</b>
Illinois	\$0.27	\$0.17	0.61
<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>\$0.29</b>	<b>\$0.24</b>	<b>0.85</b>
<b>Delaware</b>	<b>\$0.33</b>	<b>\$0.16</b>	<b>0.50</b>
Iowa	\$0.40	\$0.25	0.62
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>\$0.45</b>	<b>\$0.25</b>	<b>0.55</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>\$0.49</b>	<b>\$0.45</b>	<b>0.92</b>
Tennessee	\$0.50	\$0.20	0.41
<b>Maryland</b>	<b>\$0.51</b>	<b>\$0.29</b>	<b>0.56</b>
Vermont	\$0.55	\$0.50	0.92
Michigan	\$0.57	\$0.29	0.50
<b>New York</b>	<b>\$0.63</b>	<b>\$0.33</b>	<b>0.52</b>
Indiana	\$0.65	\$0.17	0.27
Kentucky	\$0.68	\$0.31	0.46
Mississippi	\$0.73	\$0.29	0.40
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>\$0.74</b>	<b>\$0.17</b>	<b>0.22</b>
Florida	\$0.94	\$0.65	0.70
<b>South Carolina</b>	<b>\$0.98</b>	<b>\$0.77</b>	<b>0.79</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>\$1.15</b>	<b>\$0.73</b>	<b>0.63</b>
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>\$1.20</b>	<b>\$0.08</b>	<b>0.07</b>
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>\$1.27</b>	<b>\$0.58</b>	<b>0.46</b>
Texas	\$1.27	\$0.98	0.77
Missouri	\$1.37	\$0.54	0.40
Ohio	\$1.86	\$0.46	0.25
Louisiana	\$2.20	\$0.87	0.39
California	\$2.76	\$2.18	0.79
Average	\$0.89	\$0.46	0.52

A cursory glance at Table 4 does not reveal any obvious patterns of state spending and its constrained or unconstrained nature. Typical ways of breaking the states into groups are by size (either area or population), geography (north, south, or frontier), and

age of the state (either in years or original vs. new). None of these grouping appears to be related to the nature of state spending in this era, whether looking at the relatively or absolutely constrained classifications. The only pattern that jumps out is that the five states with the largest per capita expenditures were all new states, but this must be contrasted with the group of four original states being the next biggest spenders.

Furthermore, there is no obvious connection between a state being relatively and absolutely constrained. Table 5 illustrates this point, by listing the 13 most constrained states (out of 26 for which data is available), using both of these categories. Once again the original states are indicated with boldface (conveniently seven in each column), and those states showing up in both columns are indicated with italics.

**Table 5: Most Constrained States, Five Years Prior to the Civil War**

Relatively Constrained (per capita spending)	Absolutely Constrained (core spending percent)
<i>Connecticut</i>	California
<b>Delaware</b>	<i>Connecticut</i>
<i>Illinois</i>	Florida
Indiana	<i>Illinois</i>
<i>Iowa</i>	<i>Iowa</i>
<b>Maryland</b>	<b>Maryland</b>
Michigan	<b>New Hampshire</b>
<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>New York</b>
<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>Rhode Island</b>
<b>New York</b>	<b>South Carolina</b>
Tennessee	Texas
Vermont	Vermont
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>Virginia</b>

Each column in Table 5 contains seven original and six new states, and while seven states appear in both of the lists, there are some interesting differences between the two lists. For instance, the state with the lowest expenditures per capita, New Jersey, does not appear on the list of absolutely constrained states, only spending 47% on core state functions. Also, the state with the highest expenditures, California, spent 79% on core function, thus making the list of absolutely constrained states.

Of those states appearing in both columns in Table 5, five of these are part of the original thirteen states: Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, and Virginia. To reiterate what this means, these states managed to keep per capita expenditures low (compared with other states) and spent a large proportion (over 50%) on core state functions (public safety and government administration).<sup>22</sup> This group of five states is thus of great interest when trying to explain the growth of government. What did they do differently? Possible answers to that question are reserved for Chapter 3.

### *Taxation*

The other half of the budget, taxation, can also serve as an indication of policy change following institutional changes. The Sylla et al. (1993) dataset also contains taxation figures, once again broken down into a variety of subcategories. While redistribution is often discussed on the expenditure side of the budget, taxation may also serve as a means of altering the burden of government, having similar effects to outright redistribution. However, since the incidence of a tax is often difficult to ascertain without

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<sup>22</sup> Displaying the temporally constrained states, those that control growth over time, is problematic since new states are added every few years. Even for the original states this is difficult, since as seen in Table 1, data is not always available. Though it is notable that when comparing Table 1 with Table 5, the temporally constrained states do line up with the relatively and absolutely constrained ones.

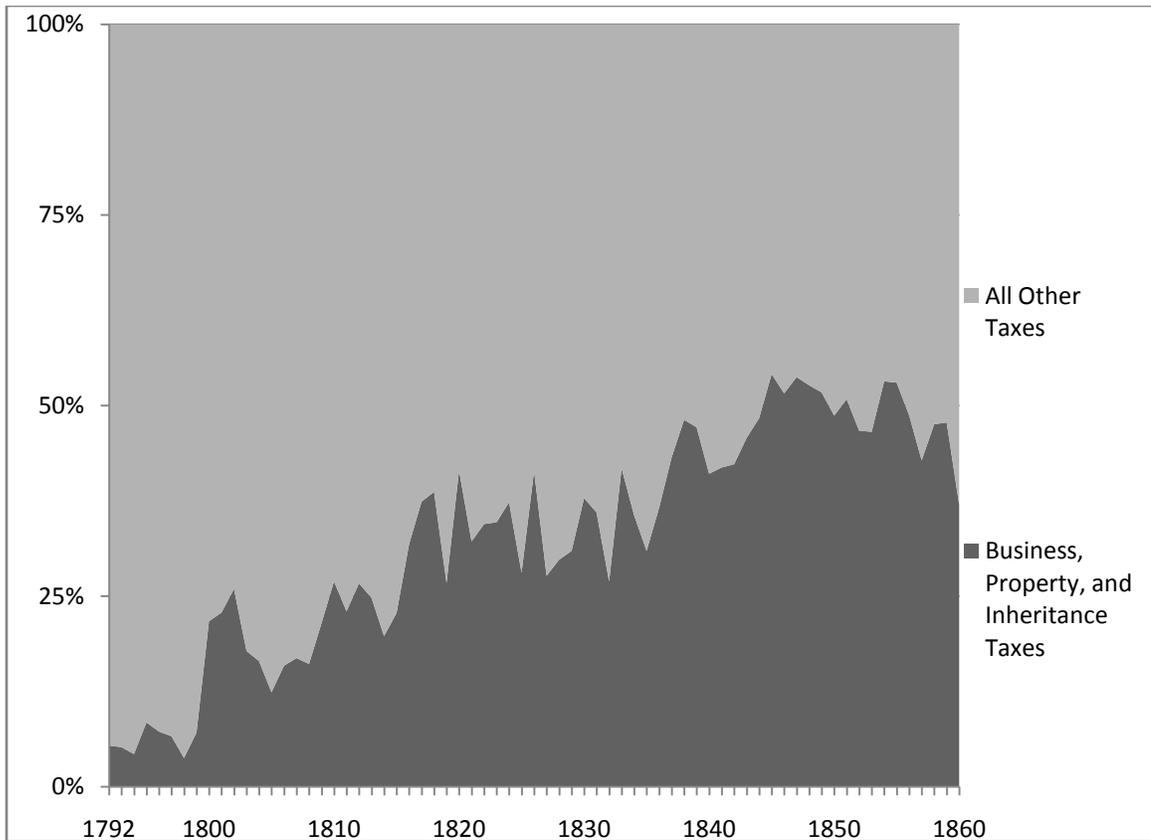
knowing the relevant elasticities, the precise redistributive consequences of a particular change in tax policy may be difficult to assess. Nonetheless, a similar examination to the expenditure subsection may prove useful.

On the other hand, the redistributive nature of taxation is even more difficult to identify than of expenditures. All taxes must take from some people and give to others, but economists have not developed a neat continuum for taxes as they have done with public and private goods. So in the end, it would seem that whether or not a tax is redistributive hinges on the how the proceeds are spent. This is why I have chosen to focus on state government expenditures rather than taxation in Chapters 2 and 3.

However, some insight may be gained by looking at the changing composition of taxation. Figure 5 shows one way to represent the changing nature of taxation in U.S. states. I have grouped tax revenues into two categories. The first is business, property, and inheritance taxes, while the second category includes all other taxes not in the first group.<sup>23</sup> As with the state expenditure totals, the data is a summation across all states, and for the early years data does not exist for a number of states.

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<sup>23</sup> The “all other taxes” category includes taxes marked as general tax revenue, as well as categories such as income taxes (both personal and business), sales taxes, poll taxes, licenses and permits, and miscellaneous other taxes.



**Figure 5: Business, Property, and Inheritance Taxes as a Proportion of Total Taxes**

The choice to contrast business, property, and inheritance taxes with all other categories is, of course, somewhat arbitrary. Many other groupings and comparisons are possible and could shed some light on the actual historical changes. This particular comparison was chosen for two main reasons. First, as is clearly visible Figure 5, these categories composed a steadily increasing share of state tax revenues throughout the antebellum era. Second, the pattern is basically what we would predict with the removal

of property and wealth constraints on the franchise. As more of the electorate is composed of non-land owners, taxing property will become more popular.

I have only offered a very brief discussion of taxation in this era, as my primary concern has been with the changing nature and growth of government expenditures. However, taxation is most definitely an area which needs to be investigated more fully.

## **2.4 Concluding Remarks**

State governments grew quite substantially in size and scope prior to the Civil War, though some states more so than others. This chapter has merely documented this fact with explaining why, but the explanation must account for the variation across the states. The next chapter offers such an explanation.

The variation in the growth of state governments, though presents an interesting challenge to the theory known as Wagner's Law, described earlier in the chapter. Not only the variation is of interest, but the fact that some state governments did not grow faster than per capita income. Some state governments did, of course, grow faster than income for the nation – much faster in some cases. A better understanding of this divergence between the states is of tremendous importance for the various theories of government growth. This is true of the antebellum U.S. because, unlike cross-country studies in the twentieth century, many of the unobservable qualities that we worry about (e.g., culture) are controlled for when we confine our analysis to states within a single country. Or, at least, they are better controlled than in other similar studies.

## Chapter 3: Expansion of Democracy in America: The Importance of Public Goods Provision

This chapter provides historical details on the expansion of the voting franchise in the antebellum United States. The narrative is told within the framework outlined in Chapter 1. It also provides a test, in a weak sense, for the predictions and results from Chapter 2 regarding constrained versus unconstrained states. In other words, this chapter examines the process by which white males earned the franchise in each state, relates those processes to one of the democratic paths described in Chapter 1, and finally checks if the predictions about state expenditures are born out (using the data in Chapter 2).

### **3.1 Introduction**

The seven decades between the ratification of the Constitution and the Civil War saw an unprecedented expansion of the democratic franchise in the United States. Unlike suffrage changes following the Civil War, voting requirements were set primarily at the state level in this era rather than the national level. The move from property-based restrictions to nearly universal adult white male suffrage by 1860 occurred gradually throughout the period rather than in a single outburst of democratic expansion. The transitions, while implemented gradually, were drastic in terms of the proportion of the population that received the franchise.

Estimates of the percentage of adult white males that were eligible to vote around 1790 vary widely, but most range from just under 50% (Soltow 1984: 451) to around 75% (Main 1965).<sup>24</sup> If the lower bound is true, this suffrage expansion represents a doubling of the electorate, and therefore is on par proportionately with the granting of suffrage to women. If the upper bound is true and 25% of adult white males were disenfranchised, the change is still greater in percentage terms than the granting of suffrage to blacks.<sup>25</sup>

The franchise expansion in the U.S. is also drastic compared with other countries at the time. Flora et al. (1983: 89-151) have compiled comparable data back to 1815, at which time Norway had the broadest European franchise, 28.3% of the adult male population. France's electorate included 1-2% of the adult males until the 1848 Revolution, when the franchise became nearly universal (around 90%) for males. Denmark also achieved a broad suffrage around this time; when the absolute monarchy ended in 1849, around three-quarters of adult males gained the right to vote. In Britain the first major change in suffrage came in 1832 with the First Reform Act, but this only increased the proportion of enfranchised adult males from 11.0% to 17.5%. Even as late as 1910, just 62.4% of adult males were eligible to vote in Britain.

In this paper several aspects of early America are examined to demonstrate the importance of public goods and political exchange for democratic change. First, I explain

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<sup>24</sup> Williamson (1960: 38) and Bailyn (1969: 87) agree with the range of 50-75% of white males, though there is considerable variation across states and localities. See Lutz (1991: 23-24) for further discussion of these estimates.

<sup>25</sup> According to the 1860 U.S. Census (598-599), the U.S. contained 3,953,760 slaves and 488,070 free blacks out of a total population of 31,443,321, meaning that blacks composed 14.1% of the population just prior to the Civil War.

the timing and ordering of suffrage expansion among the several states. Along with this discussion is an examination of the debates over suffrage in the states, highlighting arguments about the need for including militia members in the polity. Finally, I also examine various contractions of the franchise in this era, which are difficult to explain under alternative frameworks but fit well within a rational choice, political exchange framework.

### **3.2 The Militia in the Early Republic**

Because of the importance of the militia for the expansion of democracy, some background on its operation in this era is necessary. For most of the antebellum era, no states used direct financial incentives to encourage militia participation. Militia members sometimes qualified for federal pensions or land grants when called into service of the nation, but states did not regularly use this method. However this does not mean that the militia can be described as voluntary. In fact, a form of conscription was used. By federal law, all adult white males between the ages of 18 and 44 were required to perform militia service, with the possibility of monetary fines for not serving. Wealthier individuals were often able to avoid service by simply paying these fines. In addition to potential fines, militiamen were also required to pay for their own arms and equipment.<sup>26</sup>

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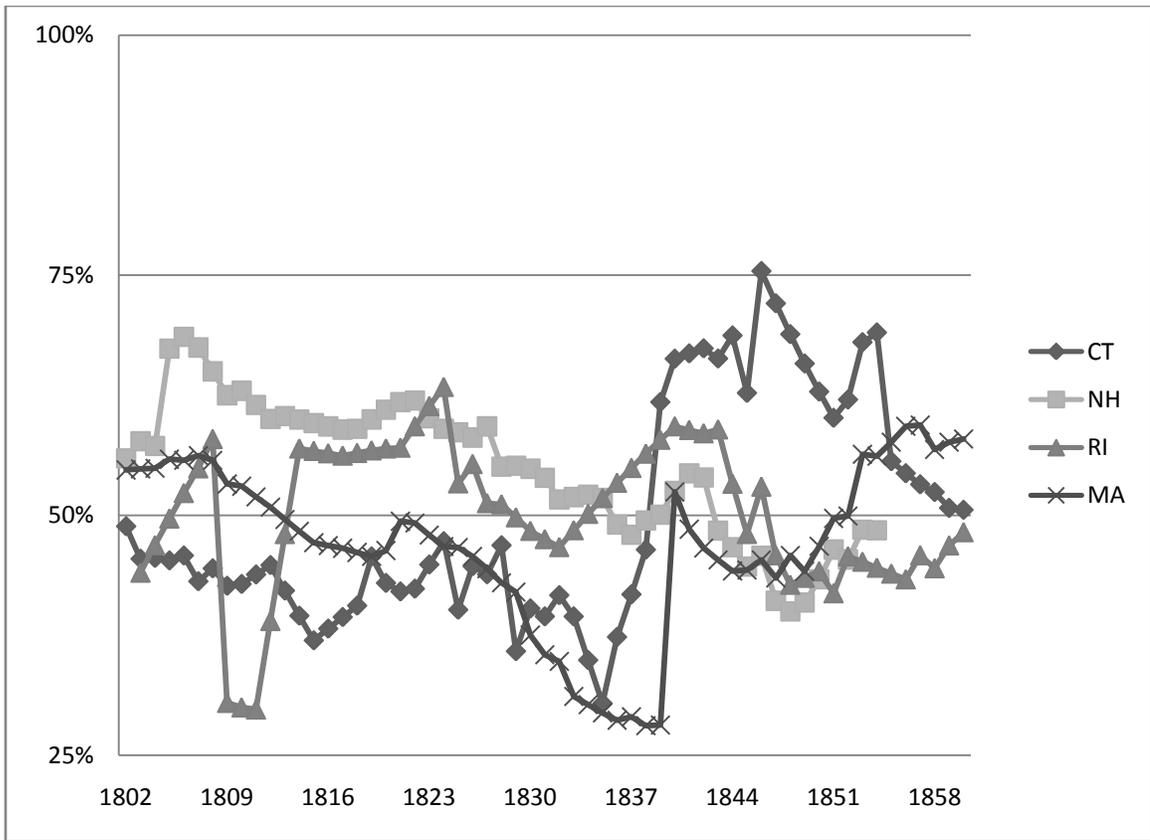
<sup>26</sup> The requirement for white men 18-44 to perform militia service comes from two acts passed in 1792, collectively referred to as the Militia Act of 1792. The second of the two acts, the Calling Forth Act, established fines for not participating in the militia when called into the service of the United States. Fines were imposed, and although collection was often difficult, the aggregate amounts could be substantial. For instance, following the War of 1812, around 10,000 men were fined a total of nearly \$500,000 at a time when the federal budget was around only \$20 million (*American State Papers: Military Affairs, Vol. 2* p. 316). On the compulsory nature of the militia system see Mahon (1960: 18-22, 47-48), Hummel (2001: 45-48, 56-57), and *American State Papers: Military Affairs, Vol. 2* (315-319, 329-337, 389-395, 527-529).

Despite the potential for fines, there was considerable variation in militia enrollment rates across states. Thus, in some states granting suffrage to militia members or all adult white males enfranchised basically the same group of individuals, while in other states the two methods of enfranchisement should be thought of separately. Figures 5-7 show militia enrollment as a percent of the eligible white male population. The data are compiled from reports that were submitted by the states for most years between 1802 and 1860, with just five<sup>27</sup> years in which no reports were compiled by the Secretary of War (unfortunately these years are clustered around the War of 1812).<sup>28</sup> Not every state filed a report in each year, but there is still plenty of data to examine. The data is very detailed, listing the number of militia members down to individual ranks as well as the type of soldier (e.g., infantry or cavalry).

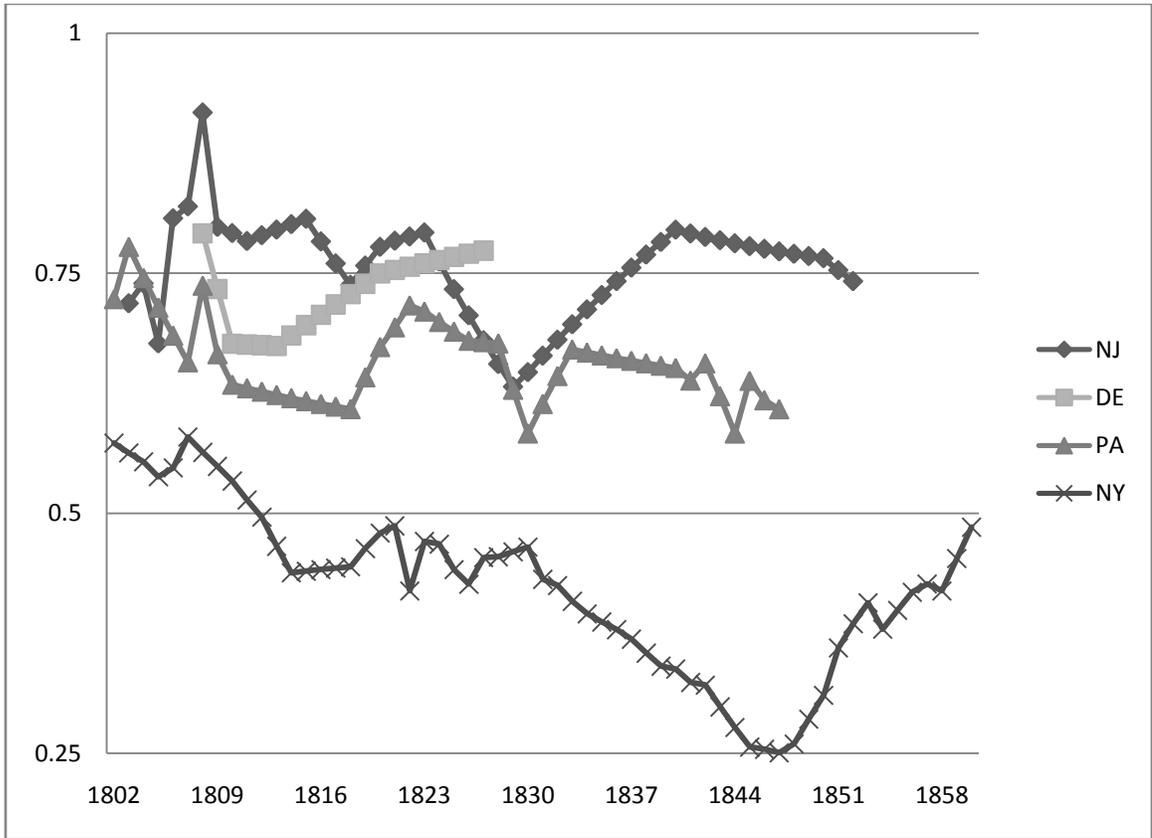
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<sup>27</sup> Riker (1957: 24) lists seven years without reports, but I was able to locate the 1846 and 1847 reports.

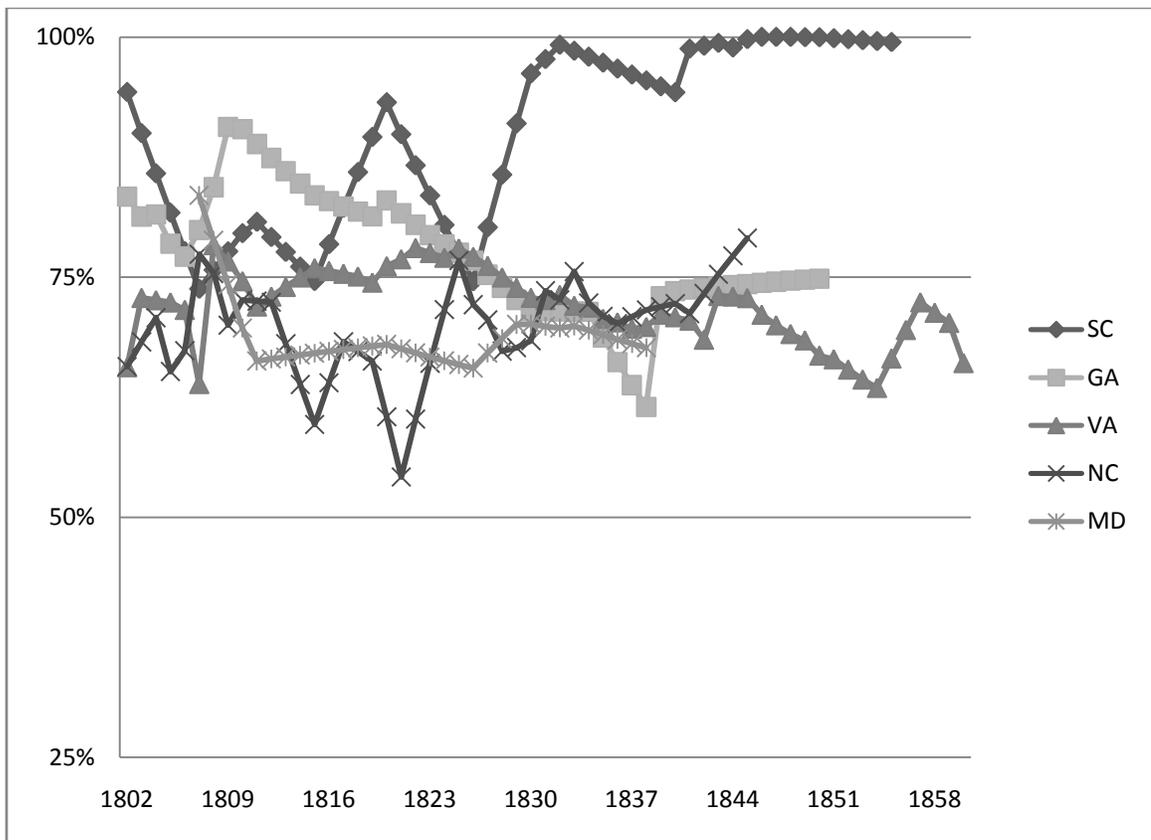
<sup>28</sup> The state reports were submitted to the Secretary of War, and can be found in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* (through 1837) and the U.S. Serial Set (for all other years). Missing years are interpolated between end points. Population data are from the decennial U.S. Censuses.



**Figure 6: Militia Enrollment as a Percent of Adult White Males 16-44, New England**



**Figure 7: Militia Enrollment as a Percent of Adult White Males 16-44, Mid-Atlantic States**



**Figure 8: Militia Enrollment as a Percent of Adult White Males 16-44, Southern States**

To my knowledge, the totals for enrollment have not been previously compiled in a systematic way. The closest to a systematic examination of the data is found in Riker (1957: 21-27), however Riker only looks at whether or not a state filed a report in each year. Riker shows a steady decline in the number of states filing reports over the period, and he uses this as a proxy for how well organized the militia was. His logic is that if a state militia is not even organized well enough to file a simple report, they are certainly not organized well enough to serve their purpose in combat. Riker also shows a wide

variance in annual filing rates for individual states, from a high among the original thirteen states of 96% in Massachusetts, to a low of 7% in Delaware.

One fact that stands out in Figures 5-7 is that militia enrollment rates are typically higher in the South, with a few states exceeding 100% in some years.<sup>29</sup> The militia enrollment rates can be interpreted as a proxy for the threats faced by a state, with higher rates corresponding to greater threats (both internal and external).

Slave patrols were an important component of the militia in Southern states. Keeping a race of people in bondage required a strong enforcement mechanism, and the slave patrols were such a mechanism. The patrols were first established prior to independence, but continued in operation through the Civil War. Slave patrols were closely related to the militia in the era, with patrol members being drawn directly from the militia ranks. And unlike the militia at large, several states did directly compensate men that participated in the patrols: Virginia and North Carolina paid patrollers, while South Carolina did not.<sup>30</sup> The higher Southern rates of militia enrollment may be partially explained by the slave patrol compensation, though not entirely since South Carolina had the highest rates but did not offer pay.

Later in this era, several states began removing fines for non-service and other compulsory measures. Delaware was the first to do so in 1816, but it was not followed by

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<sup>29</sup> I use 16-44 as the denominator rather than 18-44 for the simple fact that this age group is separated out in the early *U.S. Census* data. Creating an approximate 18-44 age group would not alter the cross-state comparisons. Rates that exceed 100% are possible if men outside of the required age group are volunteering for service.

<sup>30</sup> One of the few detailed examinations of the slave patrol is Hadden (2001), which focuses on Virginia and the Carolinas. South Carolina briefly offered compensation in the 1730s, but the practice was quickly discontinued (Hadden 2001: 21-23). On compensation in Virginia and North Carolina, see Hadden p. 63, which also notes that some urban areas in South Carolina offered compensation. The patrols in Georgia are not as well documented, but the situation appears to be similar to South Carolina with pay being offered in urban areas such as Savannah (Hadden 2003).

other states for several decades. Beginning in 1840, many states removed the conscription element from the militia in one way or another, such as by completely removing fines or making them small, nominal amounts. By the end of the 1850s, militia reforms had been carried out to some degree in Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, Vermont, New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, New Hampshire, and California. Not only did states remove the compulsory character of but some even began to use monetary incentives. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania offered either direct pay or tax credits, though the dollar amounts were quite small.<sup>31</sup>

### **3.3 Expansion of the Franchise**

The Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776 stated that “all men, having sufficient evidence of permanent common interest with, and attachment to, the community have the right of suffrage.” Kruman (1997: 41) finds that this language was copied by nearly every state in the Revolutionary Era declarations of rights. However these words are clearly open to interpretation, specifically how to define “common interest with” and “attachment to” the community. The prevailing opinion in England and the U.S. in the eighteenth century was that ownership of property, specifically land, met these conditions. Landowners were also seen as economically independent, thus they could not be bribed at the polls, and it was in their self-interest not to undermine the institution of property.<sup>32</sup>

However, in the Revolutionary Era and afterwards, views began to change and “the suffrage became a defensive device capable of protecting popular liberty against

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<sup>31</sup> London (1951), Mahon (1983: 85-86), Hummel (2001).

<sup>32</sup> Kruman (1997: 87-98), Williamson (1960: 3-19), and Pole (1966: 272-273).

potentially rapacious legislators” (Kruman 1997: 94). This change was first visible in the emergence of tax-based suffrage which several states granted, either in addition to or instead of property qualifications.<sup>33</sup> Participation in the militia was also used by several states as a means of granting voting rights. The militia option was used alongside both property and tax qualifications as a means of acquiring the franchise. Other states did not specifically grant voting rights to militia members, but the issue came up in suffrage debates. A few states also granted voting rights to those supplying other public goods and services, such as fire service or highway construction.

Changes in suffrage laws that expanded the franchise in U.S. states prior to the Civil War are summarized in Table 6. This table focuses on suffrage for adult white males, while suffrage for other social groups is described in the Section 4. The columns are arranged in order of their restrictiveness from left to right, with the most restrictive (property owning<sup>34</sup>) listed first. Thus, if a tax-paying option is instituted, I indicate the property qualification as ending, though it may have continued alongside the other options. Militia and other public goods qualifications are counted as being equally restrictive as tax-paying qualifications. The states are listed roughly in the order in which they moved to universal white male suffrage, corresponding with the narrative that follows. However the ordering is not strictly based on the final move to universal suffrage, as earlier reforms often came close to this milestone.

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<sup>33</sup> Suffrage based on payment of taxes is discussed in Bates and Lien (1985), Barzel (2000), and Barzel and Kiser (1997, 2002) in both theoretical and historical contexts.

<sup>34</sup> Property and land-owning qualifications are lumped together for clarity of presentation.

**Table 6: Voting Qualifications for Adult White Male Citizens, 1790-1860**

	Property	Tax	Militia	Public Goods	Universal
New Hampshire	n/a	1790-1792	n/a	n/a	1792
Georgia	n/a	1790-1798	n/a	n/a	1798
Maryland	1790-1802	n/a	n/a	n/a	1802
South Carolina	n/a	1790-1810	n/a	n/a	1810
Connecticut	1790-1817	1817-1845	1817-1845	n/a	1845
Massachusetts	1790-1821	1821-	n/a	n/a	n/a
New York	1790-1821	1821-1826	1821-1826	1821-1826	1826
Virginia	1790-1850	n/a	n/a	n/a	1850
Rhode Island	1790-1842	1842-	1842-	n/a	n/a
New Jersey	1790-1807	1807-1844	n/a	n/a	1844
Delaware	1790-1792	1792-	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pennsylvania	n/a	1790-	n/a	n/a	n/a
North Carolina	1790-1856	1856-	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mississippi	n/a	1817-1832	1817-1832	n/a	1832
Louisiana	n/a	1812-1845	n/a	n/a	1845
Ohio	n/a	1803-1851	n/a	1803-1851	1851

*Notes:* The dates represent the period for which each qualification was the relevant, binding constraint. Some states did not drop property or tax qualifications in one step. Only the final removal is shown.

*Sources:* Porter (1918), Williamson (1960), Keyssar (2000), Engerman and Sokoloff (2005), Wilentz (2005), and sources in the text.

In 1790 property and land-owning qualifications were present in most states. Of the original thirteen states only four did not have property-holding restrictions on suffrage in 1790, and all of these used tax-paying restrictions. The remaining states all used tax-paying qualifications at some point as an intermediate step prior to universal white male suffrage, except for Maryland and Virginia. Of the newly admitted states, just three (Ohio, Louisiana, and Mississippi) used tax-paying as a means of acquiring suffrage for a

period of time, and most moved immediately to universal white male suffrage. Crucial for the political exchange framework, not a single new, frontier state used property qualifications for voting. Thus while the new, frontier states will not be addressed much in my historical narrative, their direct movement to universal white male suffrage is an important fact supporting the political exchange framework.

### *Early Expansions of the Franchise*

The first state to move to universal suffrage was not one of the original thirteen states, but Vermont, the first new state to be admitted to the union. While my study is mostly confined to the original states, Vermont is important not only for being the first state with universal suffrage, but also for its relationship to neighboring New Hampshire. Vermont's constitution was drafted during the Revolutionary War in 1777, but it did not become a state until 1791. Later that same year, New Hampshire held a convention to revise its constitution. One revision dropped the tax-paying requirement for voting, establishing universal manhood suffrage in New Hampshire.

The reasons for Vermont and New Hampshire moving to universal suffrage are, unfortunately, unclear. The journal of the convention in New Hampshire notes the change in wording of the suffrage clause, but provides no guidance on the rationale behind the change.<sup>35</sup> A plausible reason is that the change in New Hampshire was a direct response to the Vermont's entering the union with such liberal suffrage provisions. This reasoning has been proposed by scholars ranging from Progressive Era historian Kirk Porter (1918: 23) to modern economic historians Engerman and Sokoloff (2005: 902).

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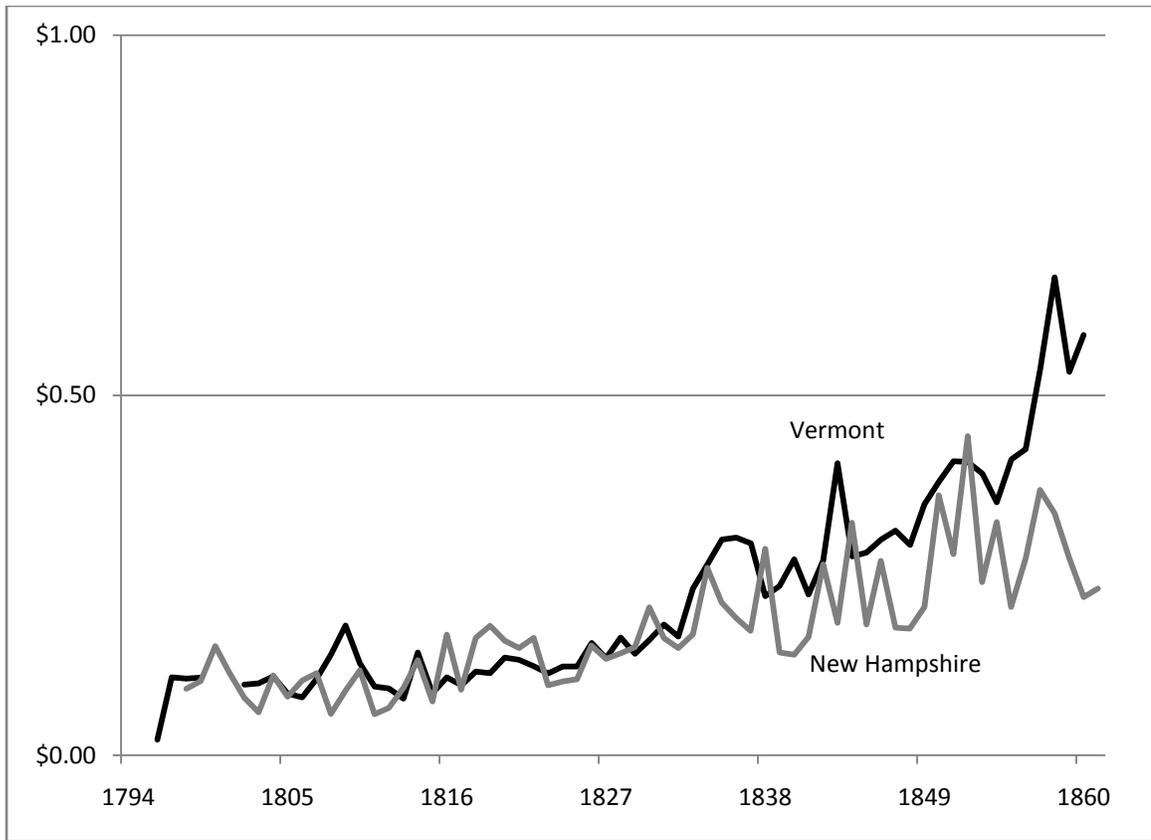
<sup>35</sup> *Journal of the Convention which Revised the State Constitution in 1791-1792* (1877: 95).

If these speculations are in fact a part of the actual reasons for expanding suffrage in New Hampshire, the state can fit within the interstate competition democratic path from Chapter 1. Classification of the democratic transition in Vermont is even less clear, but the various liberal aspects of their constitution (including abolition of slavery and public schools) seem to fit with the ideological mode of suffrage change. However, Vermont geographic location as frontier state, and therefore its need to give individuals a political voice to encourage militia participation, is another probable reason.

Figure 9 shows total expenditures in Vermont and New Hampshire from 1794 to 1860 (New Hampshire expenditures begin in 1797). Expenditure data are not available for these states prior to the liberalization of suffrage laws; therefore we cannot compare these states in a before-and-after sense. The per capita spending levels in these two states are remarkably similar for several decades up through the 1830s. At this point spending in Vermont begins increasing at a faster rate, until a clear divergence is visible in the last few years of the series. By 1860 per capita spending in Vermont is roughly two and a half times that in New Hampshire.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The trends in spending, as well as the proportion in 1860, are basically the same if we use core spending for these two states.



**Figure 9: Total Expenditures in New Hampshire and Vermont (per capita 1860 dollars)**

Perhaps it is a stretch to attribute a change in spending patterns in the 1830s to changes in the electorate in the 1790s, rather than the changing needs of the respective states. However, if this pattern reappears in more states, we can be more confident in the conjecture. The comparative data presented in Figure 9 should at least give us some confidence that labeling New Hampshire a constrained state (as I did in Chapter 2) is an accurate characterization.



**Figure 10: States and Territories, 1796-1798**

Since the notion of “frontier states” plays a potentially important role in the suffrage transitions I am describing, it may be useful to have a visual representation of the United

States in the late 1790s. Figure 10 shows the political boundaries from approximately 1796 to 1798.<sup>37</sup> The map says nothing about the respective suffrage laws at the time. Instead, it is intended to give the reader a sense of the states that are on the frontier in this time period. Frontier states can roughly be defined as those sharing a border with a foreign nation.

By this point in history, many of the southern states are essentially shielded from the frontier by new states or existing territories, even though they may have been on the frontier at some point in the past. Thus by 1798, of the original states<sup>38</sup> the only remaining frontier states without universal suffrage are Georgia, New York, and Pennsylvania. The latter two states, though, have somewhat small sections of their borders shared with a foreign nation (especially Pennsylvania), with their centers of population safely near the east coast of the country.

Based on Georgia's unique position geographically in the late 1790s, it should not surprise us that they were the next state to move to universal manhood suffrage, which occurred in 1798. In addition to its frontier location, Georgia possessed two other threats to the safety of its free inhabitants: the enslaved African population and potentially hostile native tribes.

Prior to the move to universal suffrage, Georgia replaced its property qualifications with a tax-paying provision in 1789. A proposal around this time to raise the property qualification to 50 pounds was "criticized on the grounds that it would discourage

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<sup>37</sup> The image is a modified version of one found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United\\_States\\_1796-1798.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_1796-1798.png)

<sup>38</sup> As mentioned above, nearly all new states came into the union without suffrage restrictions for white males. This fact not only fits with the frontier, interstate competition model for suffrage extension, but also makes analysis of these states and their budgets a different project altogether.

immigration and anger war veterans,” indicating that the interstate competition and public goods motives were operating in Georgia.<sup>39</sup> The reasons for Georgia’s final push to universal manhood suffrage in 1798 are, similar to Vermont and New Hampshire, not precisely clear. This is, perhaps, just as well for my analysis since data on Georgia’s budget is not available until well after the Civil War.

Maryland was the next state to move towards universal suffrage. Agitation for giving the suffrage to militia members in Maryland dates at least back to their Constitutional Convention of 1776. The elections for the Convention maintained the colonial suffrage qualification of 50 acres freehold or 40 pounds of property, disenfranchising many militia members. Militiamen went to the polls anyway in several counties in what has been described by historians as an uncoordinated, spontaneous action. Some of the men even suggested laying down their arms if they were not permitted to vote, this during the same summer that the Colonies declared independence. The only results of the militia demands of 1776 appears to be that their votes were declared ineligible and the property qualification was lowered by 50-percent in the resulting Maryland Constitution.<sup>40</sup>

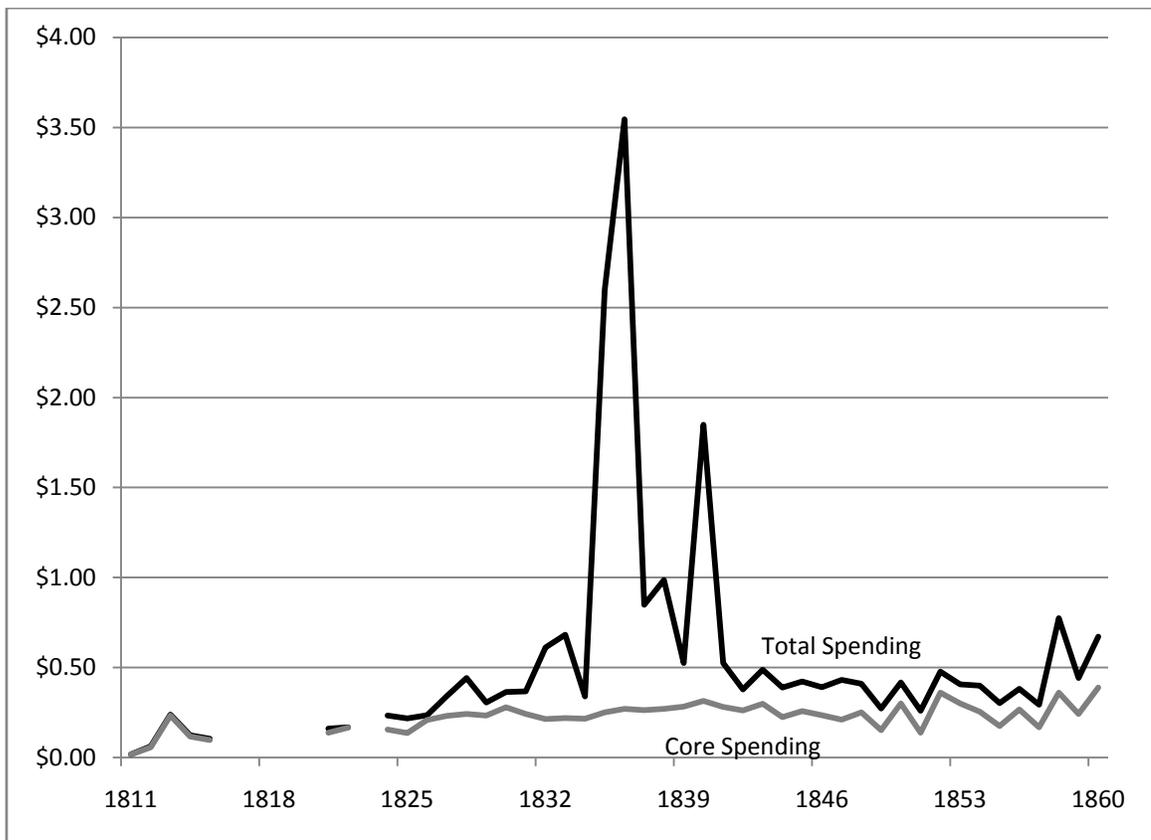
The next major push for expanding suffrage in Maryland came in 1797, when a bill for universal suffrage was introduced during the looming threat of the Quasi-War with France. One historian speculates that the threat of war may have “made it just and necessary to appease the militia men, some of whose fathers in ’76 had not been anxious to fight for the rights of Maryland unless they were given the right to vote.” The measure

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<sup>39</sup> Quotation in Williamson (1960: 131).

<sup>40</sup> Williamson (1960: 108-109), Kruman (1997: 91, 99-100), Pole (1958), and Keyssar (2000: 16-17).

was defeated in the state senate, as were subsequent bills in 1798 and 1799, until a bill for universal white male suffrage was approved in 1802. The reason for the senate's change of mind seems to be a threat to make it a directly elected body, but the arguments about disenfranchised militia members once again appeared in local newspapers just prior to the bill's passage.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 11: Maryland Total and Core Spending (1860 per capita dollars)**

<sup>41</sup> Williamson (1960: 138-151) and Pole (1958). Quotation from Williamson (1960: 141).

Figure 11 shows expenditure data for Maryland.<sup>42</sup> Once again, we unfortunately do not have data prior to 1802, when the franchise was broadened to include nearly all white males. Instead, the data set begins in 1811.

Two basic facts stand out when looking at the Maryland data. The first is the large spike in the mid-1830s and another smaller spike a few years later. By disaggregating the data, it is clear that these spikes are due almost entirely to increases in transportation spending. As was the case in many other states, there were periodic increases in spending on transportation and other infrastructure projects throughout this era (a fact which was clearly demonstrated in Figures 3 and 4 above).

The second fact that stands out in the Maryland is absence of growth in core government spending over the period. This fact mostly holds for total spending as well, if we ignore the spikes in the middle and just look at the end points. The limited growth in the size of the state government, as well as the absence of sustained expansion of government activities, were the reasons for counting Maryland as a constrained state in the previous chapter. The data presented here do not contradict that initial judgment.

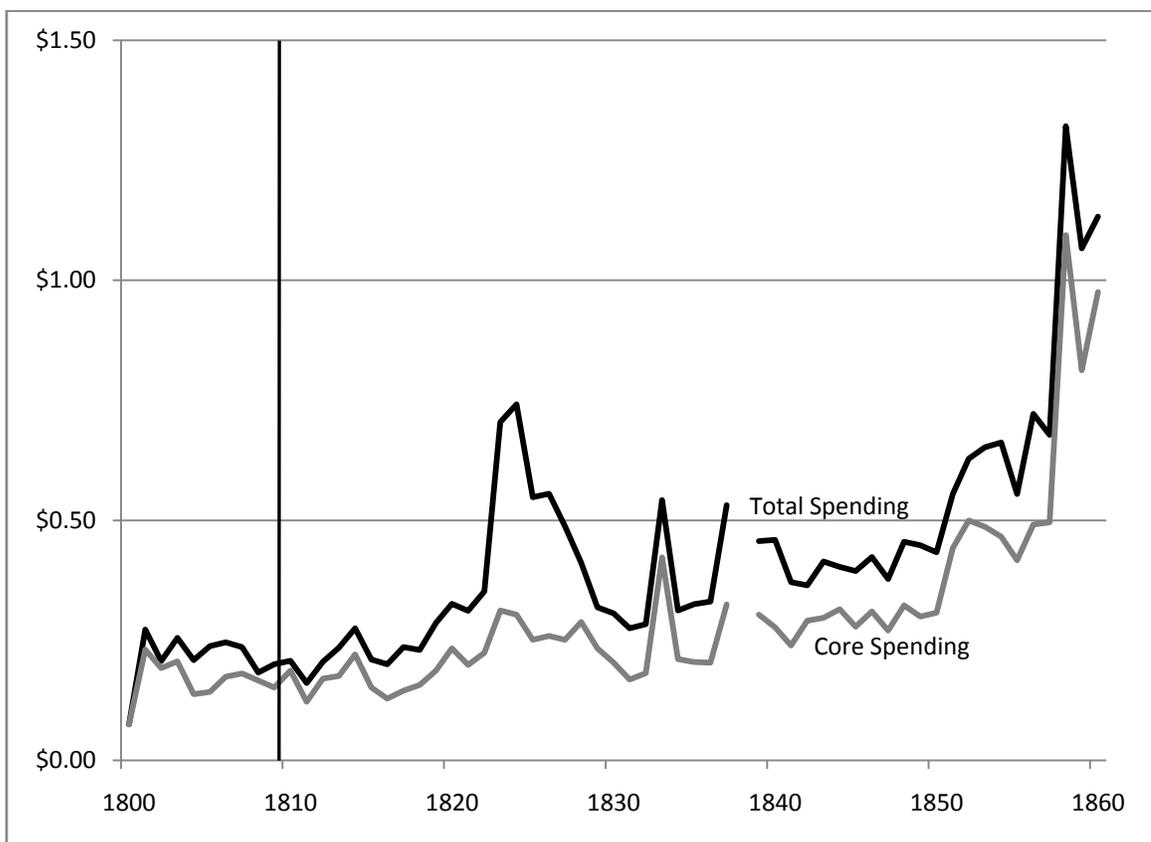
Suffrage in South Carolina also expanded following the threat of war, this time with Britain following the *Chesapeake* Affair of 1807, when the American ship *Chesapeake* was attacked by a British ship. Following the Revolutionary Era, South Carolina retained its colonial suffrage qualifications, which included a tax-paying alternative to land and property requirements, the only state to have the tax qualification prior to the Revolution.

After the *Chesapeake* Affair, the movement for removing all economic impediments to

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<sup>42</sup> It should be stressed the vertical axes have different scales in all of these state-level figures to show detail. Care must be taken when comparing the various figures. The years on the horizontal also vary based on data availability.

suffrage picked up steam. Appeals were made to the fact that many disenfranchised men were members of the militia, as well as working on the public roads and serving in the slave patrol. As in Maryland, the first attempt to broaden the suffrage was defeated in the state senate in 1808, but a similar bill succeeded in 1809, becoming effective in 1810.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 12: South Carolina Total and Core Spending (per capita 1860 dollars)**

<sup>43</sup> McKinley (1905: 148-162), Steinfeld (1989: 339-340), and Williamson (1960: 151-157).

Figure 12 shows total and core spending in South Carolina from 1800 through 1860. This is the first case where we have data before and after the transition to universal manhood suffrage. The solid vertical line indicates the year in which the transition took place, 1810.

An upward trend in government spending begins just shortly after the expansion of the franchise in South Carolina. While it is difficult to attribute this with any certainty to the franchise changes, the timing looks about right. The jump in total spending in the mid-1820s is primarily composed of transportation spending. A general upward trend is evident throughout the period, but the increase in the last decade stands out. Average spending in the 1850s is over three-and-a-half times that of the first decade. Not only is the increase dramatic, it is composed primarily of core spending categories.

South Carolina fits well into the unconstrained category, but the explanation is less clear. Since the suffrage expansion came in response to a demand for increased a public good (security), the prediction of my framework is that spending would be relatively constrained following franchise expansion. However, South Carolina was constrained in one important respected: most of the spending was for core public goods (about 70% if each year is weighted equally in per capita terms<sup>44</sup>).

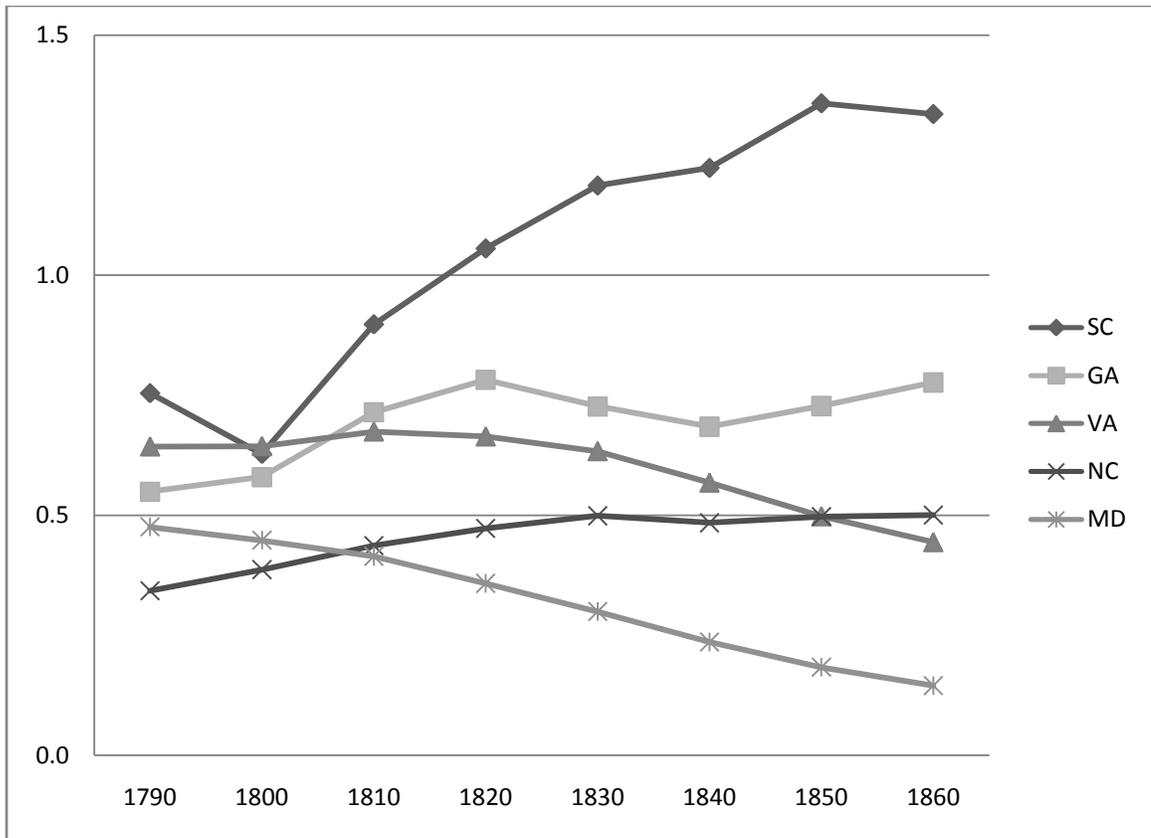
South Carolina in 1810 was no longer a frontier state, so the expansion of suffrage cannot be specifically attributed to this aspect. Instead, a major threat to South Carolina (other than the aforementioned threat of war with England) was internal to the state: the presence of the enslaved African population. This threat alone would serve as a major

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<sup>44</sup> The 70% figure holds even if cumulative spending is used.

factor in expanding suffrage, but the combination of possible war with Britain may have served as the tipping point.

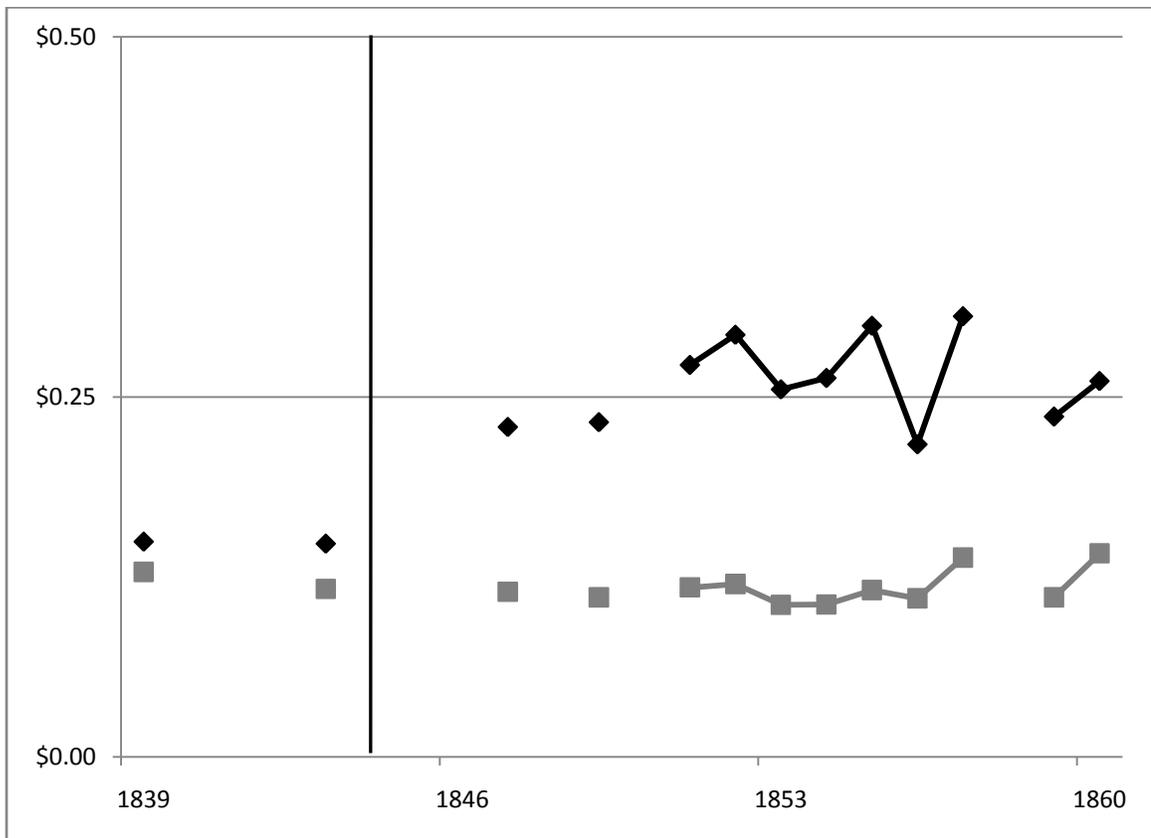
Of course, Virginia and North Carolina also possessed large slave populations and were also not frontier states (being boxed in by Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee). Why did not all three experience suffrage expansions? Virginia and North Carolina would not do so until several decades later, with partial reforms first in the 1830s and further reforms in the 1850s (discussed further below). A likely explanation is the extent of slave-holding in South Carolina. The slave-free ratio in South Carolina was much higher than other southern states, a trend which emerged in the decade prior to their 1810 franchise expansion (see Figure 13). This meant that the threat posed was much more severe, and consequently the demand for security was greater.



**Figure 13: Ratio of Slaves to Free Population in the Southern States**

The early history of suffrage in New Jersey provides one of the more fascinating cases in this period, particularly with respect to the brief period in which some women were able to exercise the franchise until 1807. Discussion of this aspect is reserved for Section 3.4, but this contraction of voting rights for women coincided with an expansion to tax-paying white males. This fact should lead us to doubt an ideological explanation, at least for the changes in 1807. The tax-paying and property requirements were finally dropped in 1844 to include all white males in the electorate.

Figure 14 shows what little data is available for New Jersey. From the few data points we have prior to the 1844 suffrage changes, per capita spending appears quite low and is composed primarily of core spending categories. Core spending remains low following the franchise expansion, although there is a noticeable increase in total spending. By 1860, New Jersey has very low total spending relative to other states, but non-core categories compose such a large proportion of spending that the state is classified as unconstrained.



**Figure 14: New Jersey Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

### *Suffrage Expansion Following the War of 1812*

The War of 1812 served as a major catalyst for suffrage reform in several states, coming through two related channels. The first channel was the renewed perception by enfranchised Americans that other nations still represented a real threat to the security of the United State. This is in contrast to the other minor and near wars since the Revolution, which seemed to affect only a state or two. Second was an alleviation of collective action problems (Olson 1965) that had previously existed for militiamen. By placing the militia in an organized state for months and years at a time, the War greatly lowered the costs of organization, which continued following the conclusion of hostilities.

In the decade following the War of 1812, the militia issue played a role in suffrage reforms in Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts, as well as debates over suffrage in new states such as Mississippi, Illinois, and Alabama. Three of these states explicitly adopted laws enfranchising militiamen (Connecticut, New York, and Mississippi). Later reforms, such as those of Virginia, can be traced back to this era as well. Several historians have noted this general trend. For instance, Porter (1918: 46) makes the observation that following the War of 1812 “attention was centered upon breaking down the restrictions against propertyless, non-taxpaying soldiers who had fought for the country’s freedom.” Keyssar (2000: 37) asserts that “in nearly every subsequent debate [after 1812] over suffrage... the issue of soldiers was invoked – not simply as a question of fairness... but also as a matter of security.”

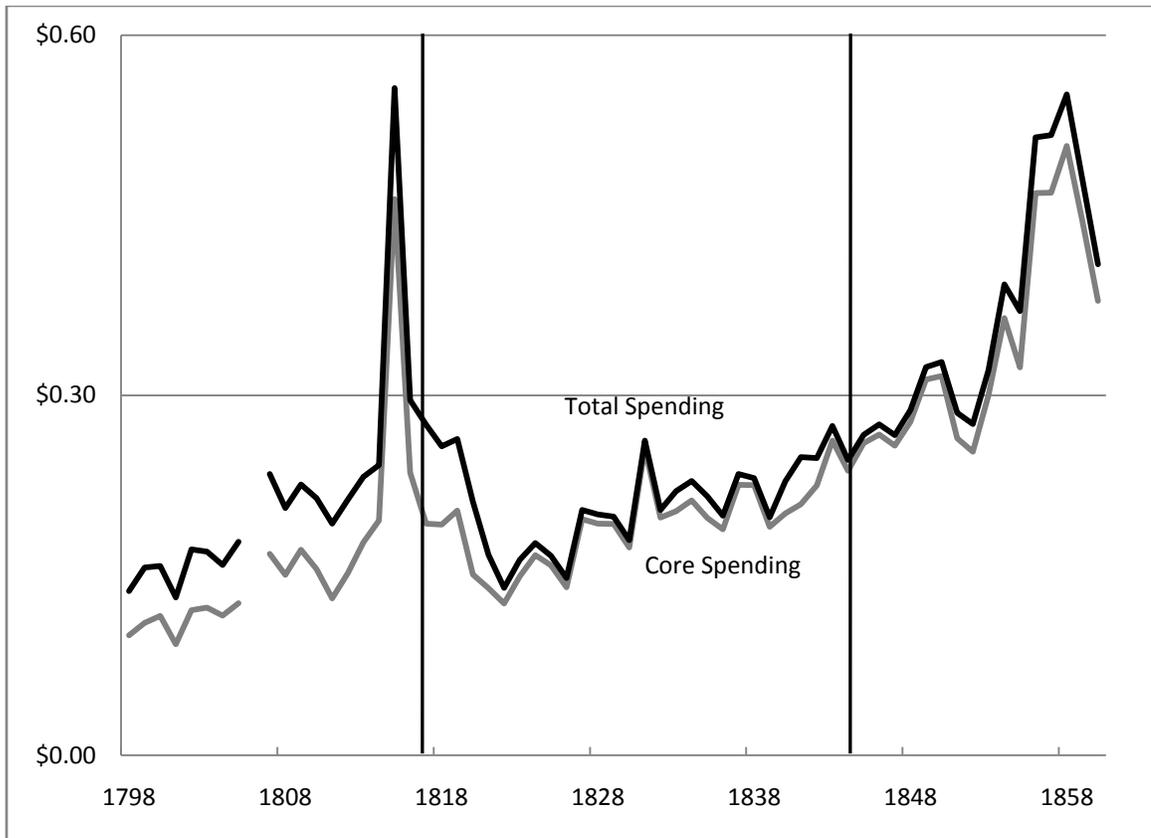
Connecticut was the first of these states to broaden the franchise following the War of 1812, and they were also the first state to specifically include a militia qualification for voting. During the War, Connecticut was still operating on its royal charter from 1662, being one of just two states not to draft a new constitution in the Revolutionary era (Rhode Island was the other). There had been demands to reform the land and property qualifications voting in 1776, including testimony from militia members that they many disenfranchised men were defending American liberty.

The real movement for democratic change came about in 1816. Summarizing arguments from local newspapers, one historian notes that reformers claimed the state's militia had been ineffective during the War because they "were not very concerned about protecting a state in whose government they had no share." In 1817 a statute was secured extending voting rights to militia members and tax payers, and this was upheld the following year in the Connecticut Constitution of 1818.<sup>45</sup>

The spending data for Connecticut is displayed in Figure 15. As before, the solid vertical lines show the changes in suffrage laws. The first, in 1817, was described in the preceding two paragraphs. The final transition to universal manhood suffrage occurred in Connecticut occurred in 1845.

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<sup>45</sup> Kruman (1997: 16), Williamson (1960: 113, 182-190), and Wilentz (2005: 183-185). Quotation in Williamson (1960: 188).



**Figure 15: Connecticut Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

Total government spending does increase over the period in Connecticut, but not as dramatically as other states. Depending on which years are used for comparison the specific increase can vary, but government spending roughly doubles using most reasonable period average, just keeping pace with income growth for the country. In fact there is virtually no growth in total spending from the 1800s through the 1840s (except for the dramatic, temporary increase for the War of 1812). The bargaining over the

expansion of the franchise, specifically with militia members gaining a say, seems to have helped constrain government spending in Connecticut.

The next state to reform suffrage laws following the War was Massachusetts, which was done at their constitutional convention in 1820 and 1821. At this point the state still maintained the property qualification of sixty pounds freehold, but Peterson (1966: 11) claims that “actual practice... approximated universal suffrage.” Despite this claim (and casting some doubt on it), suffrage was still debated during the convention, with the result that property qualifications were removed and replaced with a tax-paying qualification. Protection provided by the militia was mentioned several times in the debates. One delegate warned that when young men are “called upon to defend their country, their ardor would be chilled” without the franchise.<sup>46</sup> Notably, the tax-paying requirement for voting would persist for several decades after the Civil War.

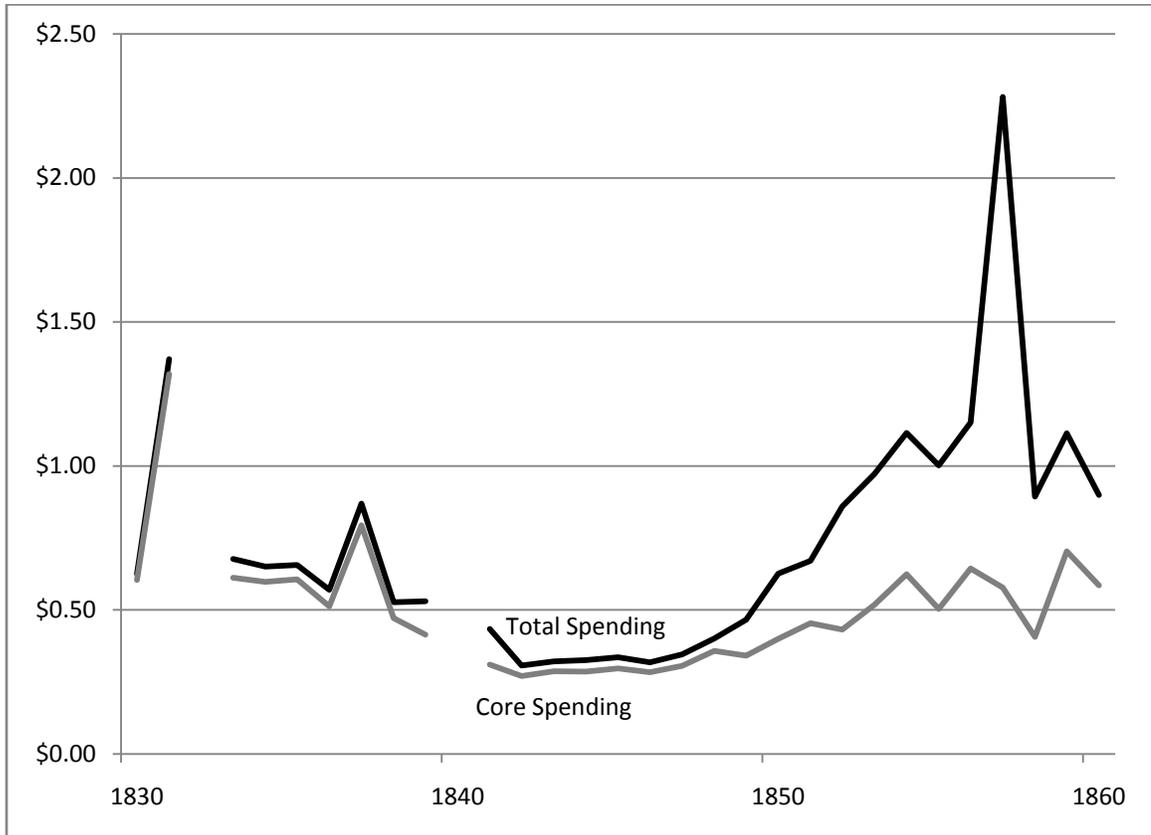
The data for Massachusetts do not start for nearly a decade after the change in suffrage law, and they are not available consistently for yet another decade. The available data are shown in Figure 16. Massachusetts starts out a relatively high spending state in the first years for which there is data, but the growth of government from its lows in the 1840s is quite noticeable. By the end of this period, Massachusetts is one of the relatively high spending states (the highest among the original states, as show in Table 4 above).

The state government was also spending more than half of its budget on non-core

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<sup>46</sup> Hale and Hale (1853: 253), statement of Mr. Richardson. See also statement of Mr. Foster, p. 246, appealing to the fact that militia duty was performed by disenfranchised men, and Mr. Blake, p. 249, protesting the new exclusion of paupers on the grounds that they served in the militia as well. Paupers will be discussed further below.

functions, primarily social services and welfare (the one year spike in 1857 is due to transportation outlays).



**Figure 16: Massachusetts Total and Core Spending (1860 per capita dollars)**

Extension of the franchise in New York followed shortly after Massachusetts, also in 1821, and is significant in several respects. Like Massachusetts, New York had established a property qualification for voting in its Revolutionary Era constitution,

which was dropped in the 1821 constitution. However, in New York this property qualification was much more binding, to the extent that more than one-fifth of adult white males were excluded from the electorate in 1821. As would be expected, the proportion disenfranchised in urban areas such as New York City was even greater and growing by the year.<sup>47</sup>

At the constitutional convention, the militia came up frequently in the debates. For instance, Mr. Ross called suffrage “the only true badge of freeman” and asked, in lieu of this badge, “where is the pledge that ensures their fidelity in defense of the state?”<sup>48</sup> Following Connecticut, New York became the second state to explicitly enfranchise militia members, at which time they also enfranchised men providing other public goods, firemen and highway workers. Along with the common tax-paying qualification for voting, also adopted in 1821, New York achieved near universal suffrage for adult white males.<sup>49</sup> The tax-paying and militia options were dropped in favor of universal white manhood suffrage just a few years later in 1826.

Expenditure data for New York are shown in Figure 17. Core spending remains consistently low throughout the period, with temporary spikes during the War of 1812 and a one year increase in police protection spending in 1858. Total spending does increase significantly in the 1820s, around the time of the two suffrage reforms. The change is mostly due to transportation spending in these years. After that the brief

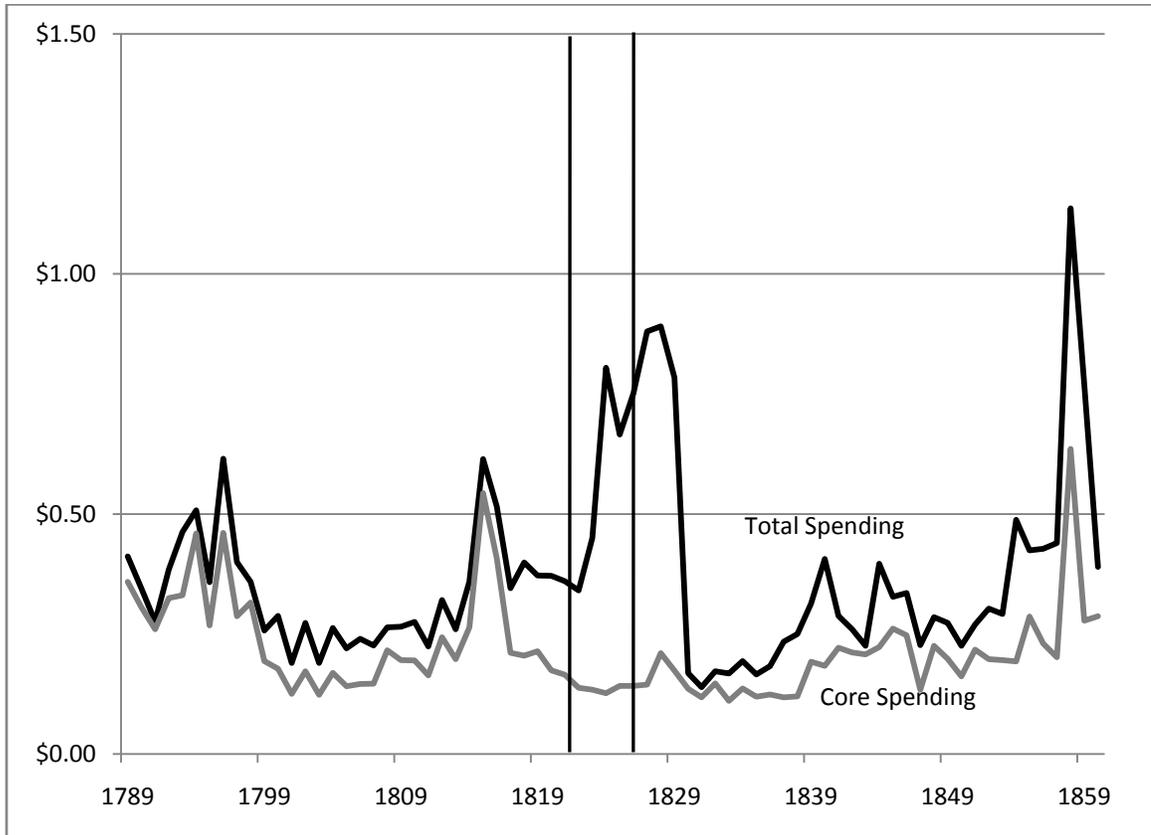
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<sup>47</sup> Hough (1857: x) reports that in 1821, 202,510 were qualified to vote and another 56,877 were enfranchised under the new constitution of that year, or 21.9% of the total. The same figure is around 25% in urban areas such as Brooklyn and Queens (Kings and Queens Counties)

<sup>48</sup> Carter and Stone (1821: 181). See also Mr. Tompkins, p. 235, asking the convention to “give [the militia] something, then, to fight for.”

<sup>49</sup> Porter (1918: 54-62) and Williamson (1960: 195-207).

increase, total spending remains low, and the bulk is composed of core spending categories.



**Figure 17: New York Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

The experience of Virginia demonstrates the importance of war for overcoming collective action problems among militiamen, but also the potential for such organized efforts to fail for many years. Following the War of 1812, the militia was clearly very

organized throughout the state and calling for access to the political sphere. In 1815 and 1816, petitions were filed in around two dozen counties calling for reform of the Constitution to grant suffrage rights to taxpayers and the militia, since Virginia still maintained property restrictions on voting. Such petitions had been filed before, but Pole (1966: 308) argues that the War “gave the single greatest stimulus to the movement for suffrage extension.” These petitions argued that if the militia had known they would not receive the suffrage and a permanent interest in the community, “they would not have fought and the state would have been defeated.” Despite these arguments, no changes in suffrage were made at this time in Virginia.<sup>50</sup>

The pressure for expanding the franchise in Virginia continued for the next decade and a half, until a Constitutional Convention assembled in 1829-1830. The suffrage issue came up not only in the debates, but also in memorials submitted by non-freeholders to the Convention.<sup>51</sup> It was argued that the militia was seen as necessary not only for protection against external forces, but also played a key role in the slave patrols. One Senator stating quite bluntly that “we ought to spread wide the foundation of our government, that all white men have a direct interest in its protection.” Some reform of

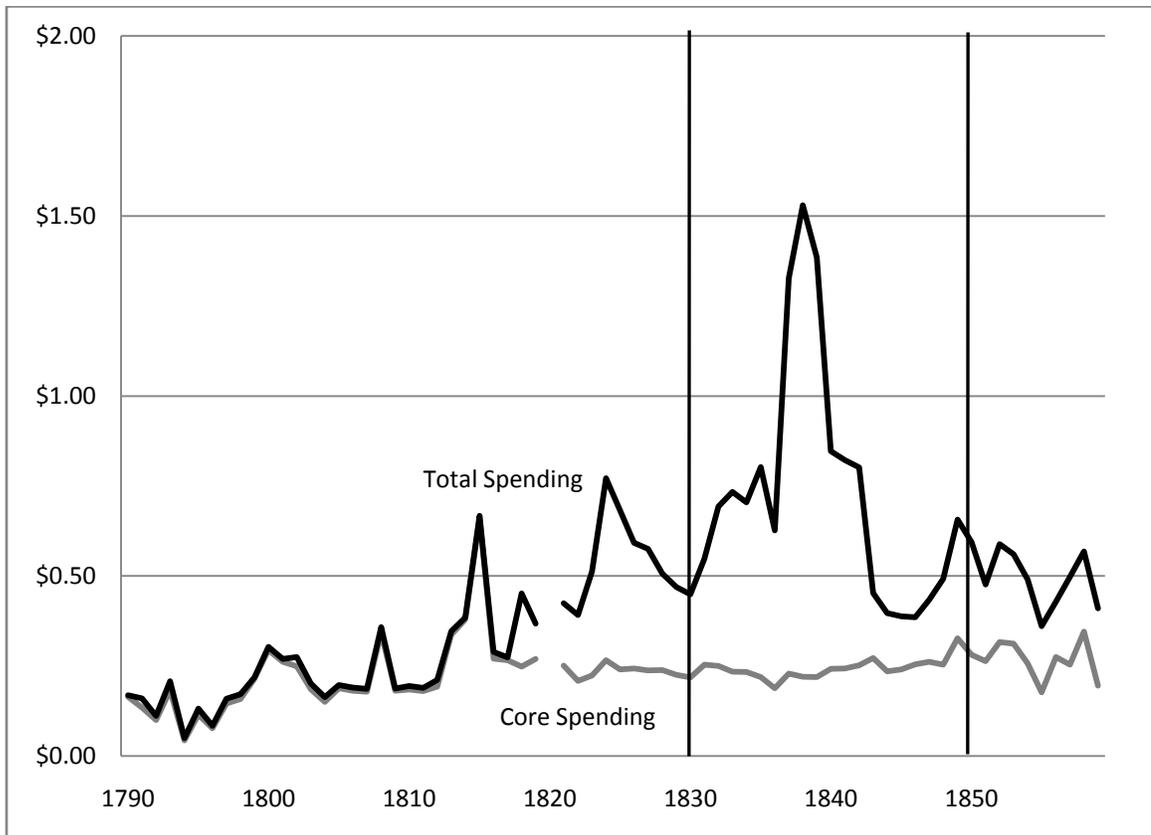
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<sup>50</sup> Pole (1966: 305-312), Williamson (1960: 226-227), and Keyssar (2000: 35-36). Quotation in Williamson (1960: 227). Petitions are on file at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, VA and are searchable online at <http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwehave/gov/petitions/>. For instance, in December 1815 there were petitions filed in at least seven counties which asked for “a Convention of the People to expand suffrage to all men who pay taxes or who serve in the militia.”

<sup>51</sup> A memorial from the non-freeholders of Richmond appears in full in proceedings (*Proceedings and Debates of...Virginia* 1830: 25-31), and others are mentioned as well (e.g., from Rockingham county, p. 32). For discussion of suffrage and the militia, see p. 123-124.

the franchise was made, but the result was only a slight extension of voting rights.

Universal suffrage for adult white males was not achieved until 1850.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 18: Virginia Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

Figure 18 shows expenditures for Virginia between 1790 and 1860. Core expenditures show essentially zero growth in real, per capita terms for the entire period.

<sup>52</sup> Peterson (1966: 279-281), Pole (1966: 314-338), Williamson (1960: 231-234), Shade (1996: 62-70), Keyssar (2000: 35-37). Quotation in Williamson (1960: 232).

Total expenditures do show continuous growth for several decades following the War of 1812, beginning well before the first suffrage reforms. Initially the growth is equally due to both education and transportation spending, though following the 1830 suffrage reforms the social services and welfare category begins to grow as well. The large spike in the late 1830s is primarily from transportation spending. However, in the last two decades before the Civil War total spending shrinks to a level that makes it one of the lowest in the nation.

### *Rhode Island: Revolutionary Threat*

The connection between suffrage and the militia is clearly present in the experience of Rhode Island, but in a distinct manner from other states. Until the reforms of 1842, Rhode Island continued to use its seventeenth century colonial charter as the basis government. The suffrage restrictions, especially the freehold qualification, were still in place as well, making Rhode Island the only northern state to retain such qualifications following the changes in Massachusetts and New York in 1821. Rhode Island was also a growing industrial center, meaning that the number property-less, disenfranchised men was increasing as well. Movements to expand suffrage had existed in the state from time to time, but with little success.<sup>53</sup>

With the above historical background, it seems inevitable that democratic change would occur in Rhode Island. The change did occur, but in a strikingly different method from all of the other U.S. states. The events of 1841-1842 are often described as the Dorr

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<sup>53</sup> The classic account of the Dorr War is Mowry (1901), while two studies from the 1970s, Gettleman (1973) and Dennison (1976), are also highly valuable though differing slightly in their interpretations of the episode. I draw on these and other sources, including Williamson (1960: 242-259), Keyssar (2000: 71-76), Wilentz (2005: 539-546), and Formisano (2008: 150-176).

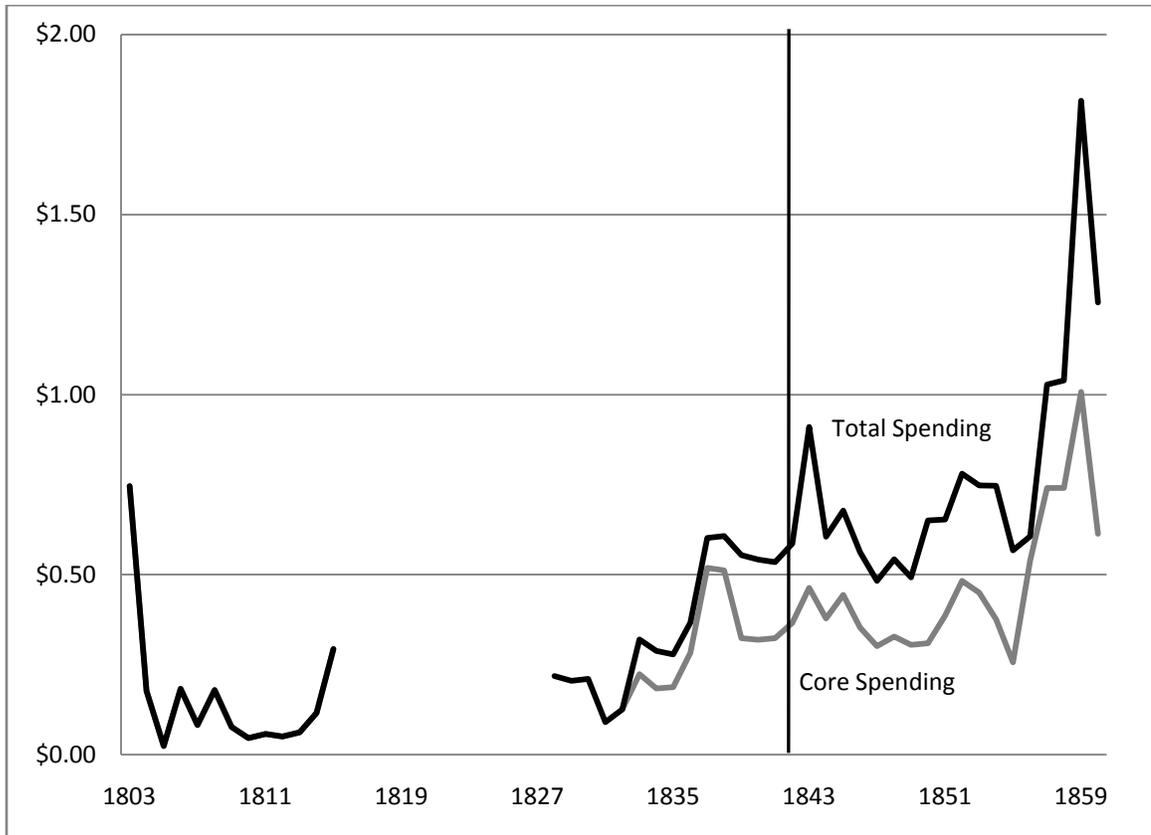
War or the Dorr Rebellion, named after Thomas Dorr, who emerged as the leader of the suffrage movement. Instead of attempting to reform the current government, in 1841 the supporters of suffrage reform decided to set up a new government. They drafted a constitution, the People's Constitution, having a much broader suffrage for white males, and elected a government with Dorr as the governor. The existing government, not surprisingly, did not appreciate this and threatened officers of the new People's Government with arrest.

The "war" portion of the Dorr War came next in 1842, but was actually very short-lived. The rebels were quickly defeated in an attempt to seize the state arsenal. Another minor battle followed, but the military effort was no match for the existing government and its supporters (including implicit support from the federal government). The cause seemed to be defeated; however before the end of 1842 the Charter Government drafted a new constitution anyway.<sup>54</sup> While not as radical as the People's Constitution, it granted suffrage to all white males that served in the militia or paid a \$1 poll tax, which resulted in a vast expansion of the electorate in Rhode Island.

The available data on expenditures in Rhode Island are shown in Figure 19. Despite the gap in data early on, total spending remains low by the time the data series picks back up in the late 1820s. After the 1820s spending begins to rise gradually, primarily in core spending. After the Dorr War and related suffrage changes, a brief spike in total spending is observed. This spike is composed mostly of education spending, as is the spike in total spending in the late 1850s.

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<sup>54</sup> The parts of the debate related to the militia and suffrage can be found in *Journal of the Convention...of Rhode Island...1842* (1859: 45-47, 53-60).



**Figure 19: Rhode Island Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

The connection between increased education spending and the Dorr War is no coincidence. Many supporters of the suffrage movement, including Dorr himself, had long been advocates of increased state spending on education.<sup>55</sup> The revolutionary constitution approved by the suffragists continued language more supportive of public schools than the competing constitutions, calling for “free schools” instead of “public

<sup>55</sup> Carroll (1918: 287, 353).

schools,” an important distinction in this era.<sup>56</sup> While the new, official constitution adopted by Rhode Island did not include the free schools language, just as with the suffrage changes the conservatives seem to have acquiesced to the rebels demands (based on the expenditure data). Property taxes, another means of redistributing income, were also adopted shortly after the revolution in 1849, with the proceeds to support public schools.<sup>57</sup>

#### *States without Universal Suffrage in 1860*

Three of the original thirteen states have yet to be discussed: Delaware, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. I have left them for this section not because their suffrage laws did not change during the period (although this is true of Pennsylvania), but rather because they did not achieve universal suffrage for white males. Two states which did not grant universal suffrage have already been discussed above: Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Before discussing these final three states, one general observation must be made regarding this group of five states which did not come to manage a political bargain on suffrage among all white males. These states all fall into the unconstrained category as shown in Tables 4 and 5 from Chapter 2. In other words, none of these five states met my two criteria of low total expenditures, with high core expenditures as a percent of the total. Such a perfect overlap may lead us to be suspicious that both of these facts are driven by some unobservable, underlying factors in the states. And indeed this may be the case.

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<sup>56</sup> Carroll (1918: 121-122).

<sup>57</sup> Carroll (1918: 146-147).

However, it should be noted that this cuts strongly against the Meltzer-Richard hypothesis. Their model predicts that expansions of the voting franchise will lead to a bigger government with more redistributive spending (essentially, my non-core categories). What we observe is almost the exact opposite of this prediction: states that were able to expand the franchise saw less government growth. This is most likely true because, as I have tried to establish throughout these chapters, the democratization came through a process of mutually beneficial political exchanges.

**Table 7: Inequality of Housing in Selected States, 1798**

	Gini Coefficient
Connecticut	0.516
Rhode Island	0.535
Vermont	0.542
New Jersey	0.562
Massachusetts	0.596
New Hampshire	0.625
North Carolina	0.627
Pennsylvania	0.649
Delaware	0.666
Virginia	0.683
Maryland	0.725
New York	0.760
South Carolina	0.828

Furthermore, differences in inequality among the states cannot explain the general pattern of constrained and unconstrained states, also an important component of the Meltzer-Richard model: more inequality should lead to more redistribution. Table 7

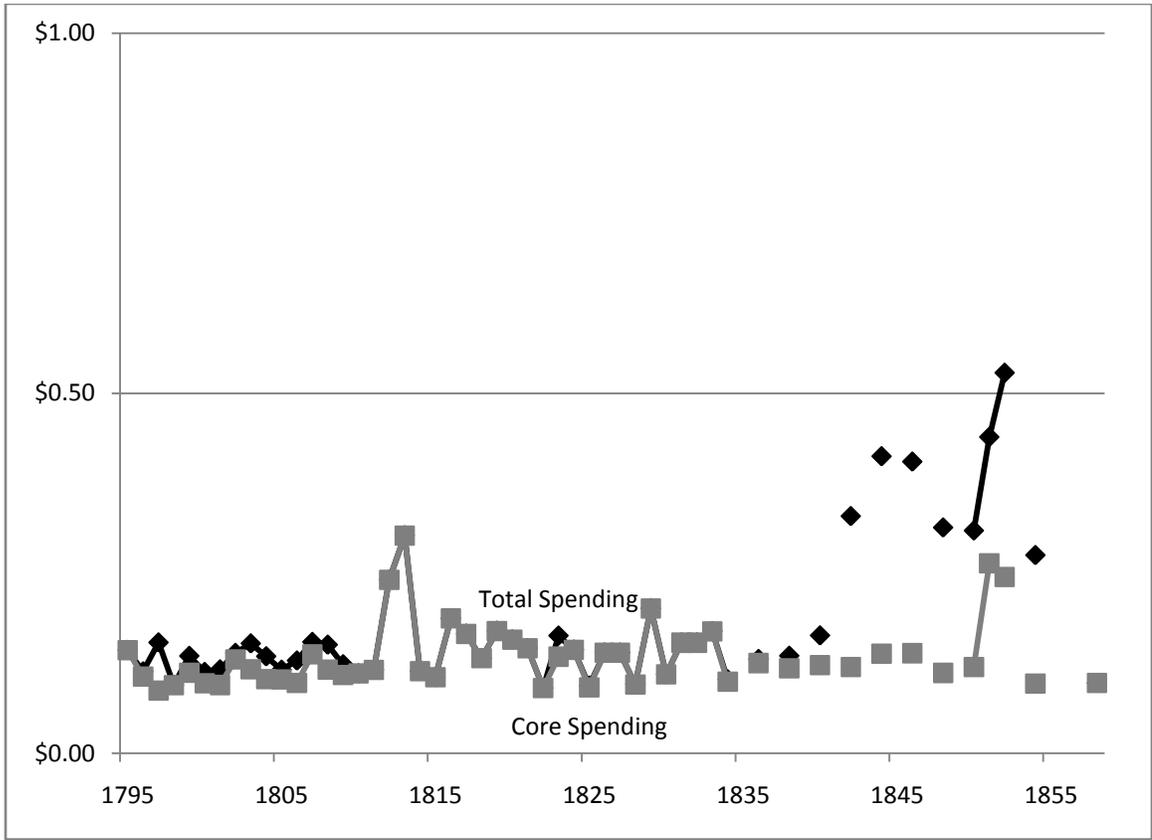
shows the rates of inequality for the states in 1798. This table is a modified version<sup>58</sup> of a table constructed by Lee Soltow (1989: 78). The measure of inequality is based on 1798 survey of housing values conducted for the entire country in order to assess the country's first direct tax. Using housing values, Soltow constructed Gini coefficients for all the states (lower values indicate less inequality).

A glance at the list of states shows no obvious patterns in relation to the list of constrained and unconstrained states. Connecticut has the lowest inequality, and it is also one of the more constrained states. However, the least constrained state, in terms of total and core spending over time, is Rhode Island, which here has a very low degree of inequality. Furthermore, the two states with the highest inequality are New York and South Carolina, but New York is categorized as constrained while South Carolina is unconstrained. In general, the inequality data do not match the predictions of the Meltzer-Richard model either.

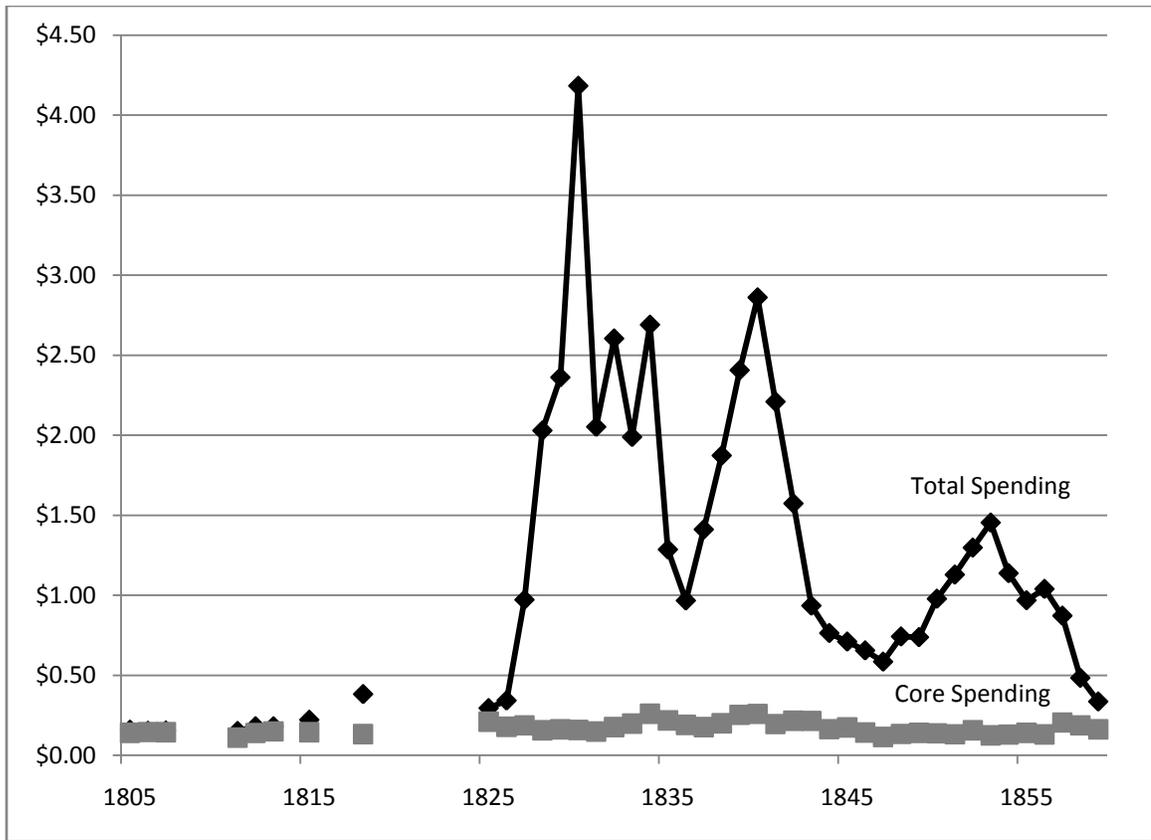
Finally, the data from the final three states, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina are shown in Figures 19-21 below. I will not offer many comments on these states, since the crucial fact is that they never achieved universal suffrage in this period (though North Carolina did liberalize suffrage laws twice). These three states are all regarded as unconstrained, having high levels of total spending at the end of the period, as well as low ratios of core to total spending.

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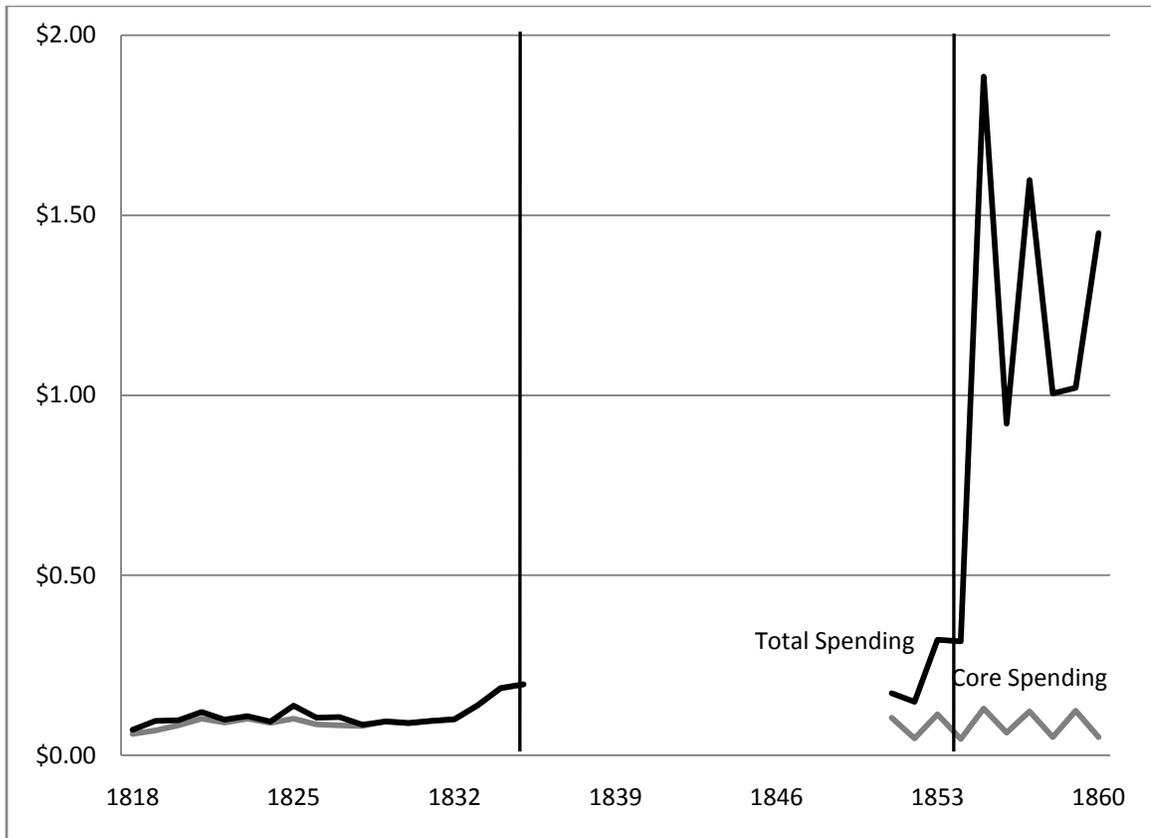
<sup>58</sup> The only modifications made were to limit the sample to the original thirteen states, ignoring Georgia (due to lack of budget data), and including Vermont. I have also sorted the table differently from Soltow and left out columns that are not pertinent to my analysis.



**Figure 20: Delaware Total and Core Spending (1860 per capita dollars)**



**Figure 21: Pennsylvania Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**



**Figure 22: North Carolina Total and Core Expenditures (1860 per capita dollars)**

### 3.4 Contraction of the Franchise: Establishing Credible Threats

While the period from 1790 to 1860 is generally regarded as one of expanding voting rights in the United States, a wide variety of restrictions were also placed on the franchise during this era. Examples of new restrictions imposed include: demographic traits, such as women or blacks; new economic restrictions, especially for paupers; various citizenship-based restrictions for immigrants or naturalized citizens; and

restrictions those convicted of specific crimes.<sup>59</sup> Some of these restrictions merely codified what was already practice. But many restrictions actually took away voting rights from a specific class, or else they prevented a class from entering the electorate who otherwise would have because of other changes in suffrage law.

Contractions of the franchise prior to the Civil War are summarized in Table 8.<sup>60</sup> A comparison with Table 6 reveals that many of the new restrictions placed on the franchise coincided in timing with other expansions of the franchise. This did not happen by accident. At the very least, these changes represented an attempt to expand the franchise in a very limited manner, which cuts against a rights-based or ideological explanation of the changes.

More strongly, the simultaneity of expansions and contractions can be seen as an attempt to make a statement to voters and potential voters: the franchise is a revocable right. Such a statement can be seen as a credible threat to further retract voting rights should a given social group fail to uphold its part of the bargain. With the history of suffrage contractions in very recent memory, the suffrage expansions were made in the context of a credible threat to retract those rights if the constitutional bargain was violated.

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<sup>59</sup> Keyssar (2000) has put together a comprehensive appendix of these changes in state suffrage laws for race and citizenship (Table A.4), paupers (Table A.6), and criminals (Table A.7) which I use throughout the discussion that follows.

<sup>60</sup> I have attempted to include only changes that were substantive in terms of actually disenfranchising one of these groups. Therefore I ignore the fact that many early state constitutions had gender-neutral suffrage qualifications, which were later modified to include only men.

**Table 8: Franchise Restrictions in U.S. States Prior to 1860 (Year Imposed)**

	Women	Blacks	Non-Citizens	Paupers	Criminals
Delaware		1792	1831	1831	1831
Pennsylvania		1838	1790		
New Jersey	1807	1807	1807	1844	1844
Georgia		1777	1789		
Connecticut		1818	1818		1818
Massachusetts			1821	1821	
Maryland		1802	1810		1851
South Carolina		1790	1790	1810	
New Hampshire			1813	1792	
Virginia		1762	1830	1830	1830
New York		1821	1821		1821
North Carolina		1835			
Rhode Island			1842	1842	1842
Vermont			1828		1793
Kentucky		1799	1792		1792
Tennessee		1834	1834		1834
Ohio		1802	1851		1802
Louisiana		1812	1812	1845	1812
Indiana		1816	1816		1816
Mississippi		1817	1817		1817
Illinois		1818	1848		1818
Alabama		1819	1819		1819
Maine			1819	1819	
Missouri		1821			1820
Arkansas		1836	1836		
Michigan		1835			
Florida		1838	1838		1838
Texas		1845	1845		1845
Iowa		1846	1846		1846
Wisconsin		1848	1848		1848
California					1849
Minnesota					1857
Oregon					1857

*Notes:* Only *de facto* contractions of the franchise are listed, not codifications of existing practice.

New Jersey provides two examples of simultaneous expansions and contractions of the franchise. The primary example was an 1807 law which extended the franchise from freeholders taxpayers, but altered the franchise to include only “white male citizens of full age who paid taxes” (Pole 1953: 58-59). The first three words of the previous quotation indicate the three groups that were disenfranchised in 1807: blacks, women, and non-citizens. Prior to this act these groups had been eligible to vote, provided that they met the freehold qualification.

As Klinghoffer and Elkis (1992) have documented, women did actually vote in New Jersey, and the inclusion of women in the electorate was not simply the result of a bureaucratic oversight in the law. New Jersey was unique in allowing women to vote, though only property-owning widows were enfranchised. Their inclusion in the electorate was deliberate, but just as deliberate was their exclusion, along with blacks and non-citizens, in 1807.<sup>61</sup> Years later when the tax-paying qualification was eventually dropped in 1844 to include all white males in the electorate, further restrictions were placed on the franchise. Both paupers and convicted felons were prohibited from voting, even if they met the other qualifications.<sup>62</sup>

New York also expanded and contracted the franchise for different groups at the same time, even during a period when democracy appeared to be ascendant. As discussed above, the New York’s Constitution of 1821 expanded the franchise in a variety ways. The freehold qualification was dropped and citizens could qualify to vote by paying

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<sup>61</sup> The early constitutions Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island did not specify that only males or freemen could vote, but only in New Jersey was this language put into practice. See also Kruman (1997: 103-106), Keyssar (2000: 54-55, Appendix Table A.1), and Zagarri (2007: 30-37).

<sup>62</sup> Steinfeld (1989: 362-363) and Keyssar (2000: 61-62).

taxes, serving in the militia, working on the public highways, or being a fireman. But these qualifications only applied to white males. Blacks were not completely barred from the polls, but in 1821 it was made sufficiently more difficult for them to participate in the electorate. The freehold qualification for blacks was raised to \$250, and they had to be a citizen of the state for 3 years (the requirement for whites was just 1 year).<sup>63</sup>

Similar stories can be told for other states changing suffrage laws following the War of 1812. In its 1818 Constitution, Connecticut took away voting rights from black, non-citizens, and criminals at the same time it extended the franchise to nearly all white males (both militiamen and taxpayers). In Massachusetts the 1821 Constitution gave the vote to tax-paying white males, but also revoked it for non-citizens and paupers. Virginia's 1830 Constitution, as discussed above, only marginally expanded the franchise for white males, but it also disenfranchised non-citizens, paupers, and criminals. While nearly all new states admitted in this era adopted no suffrage restrictions for white males, the exclusion of other groups in society was widespread across both groups and states.<sup>64</sup>

The history of Rhode Island again provides the most interesting case of both contractions and expansions of the franchise. Left out of the discussion in Section 3 was the experience of free blacks in Rhode Island. Blacks were originally disenfranchised in Rhode Island in 1822. During the movement for suffrage that culminated in the Dorr War, the movement initially pushed for the enfranchisement of blacks along with white males. However blacks were eventually excluded from the proposals by the suffrage movement. When the military portion of the rebellion was in full swing, free blacks

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<sup>63</sup> Peterson (1966: 137), Chute (1969: 312), and Keyssar (2000: 55-58).

<sup>64</sup> See generally Adams (1925), Chute (1969: 312-316) and Keyssar (2000: 53-67 and appendix tables).

joined forces with the existing government as militia members in a bargain to gain the franchise. Blacks eventually were re-enfranchised under the Constitution adopted in 1842, while non-citizens, who sided with the rebels, were explicitly disenfranchised.<sup>65</sup>

Just prior to the Civil War in 1855, only five states did not discriminate against blacks at the polls. All these states were in New England, and only three (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island) were from the original thirteen states. These five states contained just 4 percent of the country's free black population.<sup>66</sup> The number of free blacks disenfranchised was often substantial (see Table 9). This is despite the fact that in 1790 only three states discriminated against free blacks at the polls. In fact, a 1778 proposal to disenfranchise free blacks and Indians in Massachusetts was vigorously denounced.<sup>67</sup> By 1860, fully seven of the original states had reversed their position on black voting rights. More dramatically, nearly every new state disenfranchised free blacks, including all states except Maine following the War of 1812.<sup>68</sup> And as Table 7 makes clear, the retraction of voting rights was not confined to blacks, since almost every state discriminated against some other group as well.

It is tempting to place the blame for contractions of the franchise on discrimination or outdated notions of individual rights. Certainly women, blacks, and others were treated as second-class citizens in many ways, with suffrage being only one facet of this widespread discrimination. And as Zagarri (2007: 164-172) carefully demonstrates, this

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<sup>65</sup> See references at footnote 29, as well as Lemons and McKenna (1971: 10-13) and Gettleman (1973: 130).

<sup>66</sup> Keyssar (2000: 55).

<sup>67</sup> Kruman (1997: 106-107).

<sup>68</sup> Maine was formerly part of Massachusetts, which also permitted free blacks to vote.

era also saw the rise of biological theories for gender and racial discrimination. This temptation to blame outmoded ideologies does have some validity.

**Table 9: Disenfranchisement of Free Black Males, 1790-1860**

	Year	Free Blacks	Total Free Population	% of Free Population
Delaware	1792	4,773	51,791	9.2%
Pennsylvania	1838	21,877	830,855	2.6%
New Jersey	1807	6,811	223,916	3.0%
Connecticut	1818	7,587	272,387	2.8%
Maryland	1802	22,455	242,539	9.3%
South Carolina	1790	1,801	141,979	1.3%
New York	1821	14,259	708,899	2.0%
North Carolina	1835	10,394	248,395	4.2%
Kentucky	1799	678	168,676	0.4%
Tennessee	1834	2,516	297,730	0.8%
Ohio	1803	708	98,739	0.7%
Louisiana	1812	8,247	50,373	16.4%
Indiana	1816	895	97,906	0.9%
Mississippi	1817	375	34,879	1.1%
Illinois	1818	488	45,819	1.1%
Alabama	1819	576	87,838	0.7%
Missouri	1821	196	34,237	0.6%
Arkansas	1836	184	31,189	0.6%
Michigan	1837	323	85,150	0.4%
Florida	1845	408	21,489	1.9%
Texas	1850	211	85,080	0.2%
Iowa	1846	136	70,371	0.2%
Wisconsin	1848	312	135,544	0.2%

*Notes:* Intercensal years are interpolated. Prior to 1820 the Censuses did not breakdown free blacks by gender, so the total free black figure is used for those states. For states that adopted a Constitution prior to statehood, the statehood date is used. For Texas, data from 1850 is used since this is the first census in which the state was included.

However several of the facts described in this section suggest an alternative explanation, primarily that many of these social groups did possess the vote at one time, only to have it later revoked. When these groups were disenfranchised, it was rarely accompanied by any other restriction of rights (though the lack of the franchise made future predation a real possibility). Furthermore, the disenfranchisement of paupers, criminals, and non-citizens was not based any old or new theories of biological inferiority. Thus I claim that to the extent that such rationalizations of discrimination were used, they were often covering for an underlying logic that is consistent with an economic, rational choice explanation.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The expansion of the franchise in the early United States was a major event in the history of democracy. I have demonstrated here that many of the franchise expansions fit within a rational choice, political exchange framework, rather than being driven by ideological changes of mind about individual rights. Furthermore, the motivating factors were of a mutually beneficial nature, primarily driven by the demand for public goods, specifically security, by the political class. States with more severe security threats were the first to democratize, with the threats being determined by factors such as geography and demographics.

Bargains to expand the franchise were entered into with care by those possessing political power. The possibility of an expanded electorate using its new power for non-cooperative ends was a real and recognized threat. To this end several tactics were used to secure the socially optimal result. A dominant tactic was credible threats of franchise

contraction, whereby some social groups are disenfranchised at the same time the franchise is extended to other groups. Through this process of franchise extension, social groups with potentially conflicting interests were able to successfully cooperate through the polity to achieve mutually beneficial ends, as opposed to adversarial forms of democracy that would emerge later in history.

To place this era in a broader historical context, the modern welfare state and redistributive politics that exist today did not emerge in this era (though the foundation may have been built). Whatever variation in state spending we observe, it is nowhere near as large as the twentieth century would see, nor is the spending as explicitly redistributive. Social services and welfare spending is not a major factor in any state during the antebellum era, with most of the non-core spending going to the quasi-public goods of transportation and education.

However, because we do not see the emergence of explicitly redistributive spending, it is crucially important to focus on the differences that do exist between states. This is true even if we regard the new categories where tax dollars were spent, transportation and education, as legitimate state functions. Indeed, many individuals at the time clearly regarded these as proper government finance, but views about the size and scope of government was clearly in a transition period during this era. It is notable, though, that in contrast to existing economic theories about democracy and the growth of government, it was precisely those states which did find a way to expand the franchise which ended up with smaller government spending.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jeremy Horpedahl was born on July 2, 1980 in Bismarck, North Dakota. In 2002 he received his undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. For the following three years he was employed as an economist analyst at the Labor Market Information Center, South Dakota Department of Labor. He enrolled in the graduate program in Economics at George Mason University in 2005.