

# **Enfranchisement, Political Participation and Political Competition: Evidence from Colonial and Independent India \***

Guilhem Cassan  
University of Namur

Lakshmi Iyer  
University of Notre Dame

Rinchan Ali Mirza  
University of Kent

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## **Abstract**

We examine how political participation and political competition are shaped by two class-based extensions of the franchise in 20th-century India by creating a new dataset of district level political outcomes between 1921 and 1957. We find that both the partial franchise extension of 1935 and the universal suffrage reform of 1950 led to limited increases in citizen participation as voters or candidates, and neither reform had a significant effect on measures of political competition. Despite the limited effects on political outcomes, districts with greater enfranchisement increases also experienced higher education provision by provincial governments.

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\* Email addresses: [guilhem.cassan@unamur.be](mailto:guilhem.cassan@unamur.be); [liyer@nd.edu](mailto:liyer@nd.edu); [r.a.mirza@kent.ac.uk](mailto:r.a.mirza@kent.ac.uk). We thank Latika Chaudhary, Dan Keniston, Akshay Mangla, Nicola Persico, Meg Rithmire and seminar and conference participants at several universities for helpful comments and suggestions. We are thankful to Latika Chaudhary and Francesca Jensenius for their immense generosity with data sharing, and to Paradigm Data Services and the Trivedi Center for Political Data (Ashoka University) for excellent research assistance. Guilhem Cassan and Rinchan Ali Mirza gratefully acknowledge financial support of the FNRS, through the Mandat d'Impulsion Scientifique "Democratisation in Colonial India." This work was financially supported by the Excellence of Science (EOS) Research project of FNRS O020918F.

## 1. Introduction

This paper studies the political consequences of the gradual extension of the right to vote in India, with a specific focus on two dimensions of democratic life: citizen participation and political competition. The consequences of political enfranchisement have long been of interest to philosophers and political scientists (Tocqueville, 1835), and cross-country studies have shown that democratization has important economic consequences (Papaioannou and Siourounis, 2008; Acemoglu et al., 2019). However, little is known about the linkages between different facets of democracy. For example, one-third of all countries in the world have been classified as autocracies despite having universal adult suffrage, due to, among other factors, a lack of political competition (Luhmann et al., 2017).

In this paper, we examine several related questions: Does enfranchisement lead to increased citizen participation in the political sphere? How does enfranchisement affect political competition and does it result in a change in the identities of persons and parties that get elected? Does class-based suffrage extension in fact result in better government effort towards public goods that benefit the newly – poorer and less educated - enfranchised classes? We examine these questions using data from 20<sup>th</sup> century India, a setting that enables us to examine enfranchisement in a relatively poor country. We study the impact of two major enfranchisement reforms. The first is the 1935 Government of India Act, which took place under colonial rule and which significantly lowered the property thresholds for voter eligibility and thereby extended the right to vote to approximately 12% of all citizens, with considerable variation across geographic areas. The second reform is the implementation of universal adult suffrage by the post-independence 1950 constitution of India, which raised the population share of enfranchised people to 48%. We are thus able to examine the consequences of enfranchisement in both a colonial and a post-colonial context.

Building a novel dataset on electoral results from 1921 to 1957, we track stable geographical units over time (administrative districts) and see how political participation and political competition in those units are affected by these enfranchisement reforms. We relate changes in these outcomes to the district-

specific increases in enfranchisement engendered by these reforms, using first difference and difference in differences specifications.

We find that both these reforms lead to an increase in the share of voters in the total population. This increase in the proportion of voters is smaller than the increase in enfranchisement itself: a 10-percentage point increase in enfranchisement increases the voter share of the population by only 4.1 percentage points after the 1935 reform, and by 3 percentage points after the 1950 reform. This means that voter turnout, measured as the share of registered voters who exercised their franchise, shows a significant decline in places that experienced a larger increase in enfranchisement. In a similar vein, while the number of candidates increased after each of these reforms, we find that this increase is less than proportional to the enfranchisement increase, so that the number of candidates as a share of all registered voters shows a decline in places where enfranchisement increased by a larger amount. These findings are true both in the short and the medium run. Therefore, a large fraction of the population did not exert its political rights after enfranchisement had been enlarged, both in colonial and in independent India.

We use our data to construct several measures of political competition: the number of candidates per seat, the fraction of incumbents who win re-election, the fraction of uncontested races and the Congress Party's winner share. None of these measures show any statistically significant increases with enfranchisement increases, both for the 1935 reform or for the 1950 reform; if anything, we find that the 1950 reform increases the fraction of incumbents who get re-elected. In sum, our results indicate that even large increases in enfranchisement may not transform the political landscape in terms of political competition.

In terms of policy, however, we find that both the 1935 and the 1950 result in increased policy attention to primary education. We face significant data constraints in examining these policy consequences e.g. we are able to only measure education spending in the colonial period (but not actual access to schools), while the post-colonial period has data on the number of schools but not the level of spending; both of these are only available for a subset of provinces rather than nationwide. Nevertheless, we find a positive and significant association between greater enfranchisement and more primary school spending and/or access.

Our study makes three contributions to the political economy literature. The first is to a stream of literature that examines the consequences of enfranchisement on economic outcomes such as aggregate government spending. Some studies in this literature have documented a positive relationship between enfranchisement and fiscal policy, while others have found no relationship or a non-monotonic one.<sup>1</sup> A related literature studies the extension of the franchise to specific population sub-groups, and generally finds that policy outcomes change towards the interests of the newly enfranchised population.<sup>2</sup> However, there is relatively little analysis of whether it leads to a change in the nature of political participation, political competition or the identity of elected officials. Our results show that policy outcomes do change towards the preferences of the newly enfranchised, despite no significant effects on the identity of persons or parties elected to power. This is much more consistent with the predictions of a median voter model (Downs, 1957), where the identity of the legislator is of little consequence to the policies implemented, rather than citizen-candidate models of policy choice where the individual preferences of the elected personnel matter for policy choices (Osborne and Slivinski, 1996; Besley and Coate, 1997).

Our paper broadens the literature on the political impact of enfranchisement in two ways. Prior studies have focused on countries like the U.K. (Berlinski and Dewan, 2011 and 2014), the U.S. (Corvalan et al., 2017) or Italy (Larcinese, 2017). All of these were considerably richer than India at the when suffrage extensions were enacted: India's GDP per capita in 1950 equaled only 40% of UK's GDP per capita in

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<sup>1</sup> Peltzman (1980) finds that total government spending does not increase following the expansion of franchise in Great Britain, Canada and the U.S., Husted and Kenny (1997) find that the extension of the franchise in the U.S. led to an increase in welfare spending, Aidt et al. (2006) find that government size increases with enfranchisement reforms in Western Europe countries, while Aidt et al. (2010) find a U-shaped relationship between franchise extension and public spending in England and Wales. Aidt and Jensen (2009) find a positive effect of franchise extension on government spending when using a sample of Western European countries, while Profeta et al. (2013)'s study of developing countries does not find a significant relationship. Batinti et al. (2019) document a positive effect of franchise extensions on adult heights.

<sup>2</sup> The enfranchisement of African-Americans in the U.S. led to an increase in state transfers to counties most affected by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Cascio and Washington, 2014) and a decrease in schooling input for blacks in counties disenfranchised during the Jim Crow era in the U.S. south (Naidu, 2012). Women's suffrage in the U.S. has been shown to lead to more progressive voting by elected representatives (Kenny and Lott, 1999) and greater public health spending and a consequent decline in child mortality (Miller, 2008), while youth enfranchisement leads to greater spending on higher education (Bertocchi et al., 2020). Fujiwara (2015) finds that electronic voting in Brazil, which effectively enfranchised poor and illiterate people, led to an increase in public health care spending which disproportionately benefits the poor.

1867, 53% of Italy's in 1912 and 50% of the USA in 1850 (Maddison Project, see Bolt et al., 2018). Prior studies have found differing effects in these different countries,<sup>3</sup> so it is important to broaden the range of contexts in which suffrage extensions are studied. Our results are similar to those of Berlinski and Dewan (2011) and Larcinese (2017) in finding a decline in voter turnout after franchise extension, but differ from these studies in finding no increases in political competition or changes in party voting patterns.

Second, to our knowledge, this is the first study of the democratization process of a non-independent (i.e. colony) country. Political enfranchisement within a colonial system may have a different dynamic than that of an independent country. In contrast to theoretical models that argue that the threat of revolution forced the elite to extend the suffrage (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000, 2006), the situation in India has often been described as a three-way interaction between the government in the U.K., the colonial government of India and the Indian independence movement.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, the Indian National Congress, that led mass movements for independence, was not much in favour of the enfranchisement reforms: they were (rightly) denounced as a way to undermine the independence movement by attempting to “rally the moderates” (Danzig, 1969; Gallagher and Seal, 1981).<sup>5</sup> Our contribution is to document that the consequences of enfranchisement are similar across colonial and non-colonial contexts, despite the

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<sup>3</sup> Studying the U.K.'s Second Reform Act of 1867, Berlinski and Dewan (2011) find that franchise extension led to greater citizen participation as candidates and more political competition, but no increase in the share of votes for the Liberal party; Berlinski et al. (2014) show that aristocrats were equally likely to be elected after this reform. In contrast, Larcinese (2017) shows that the 1912 enfranchisement reform in Italy led to more left-wing votes but not to actual change in the profile of legislators nor to an increase in political competition. Corvalan et al. (2017) similarly find that the composition of elected politicians changes only when candidate eligibility rules are relaxed, and not when suffrage is extended.

<sup>4</sup> The specificity of this relationship has been put forward as one determinant of the way in which enfranchisement reforms were passed in India. Referring to the 1919 Government of India Act, Rothermund (1962) for example writes: “Montagu was painfully aware that the reform scheme [...] was [...] a [...] compromise between Liberalism at home and the bureaucracy in India, between British interests and Indian national aspirations, political thought and administrative practice”. Tomlinson (1976) also writes that there were [three actors in the end of the British rule in India] “... imperial planners in London, Government of India in New Delhi and the central leaders of the Indian National Congress”.

<sup>5</sup> Danzig (1969) writes: “[...] British rule in India could not function without the active collaboration of an elite and at least the passive acquiescence of the mass. It was feared that repression of 'extremists' would alienate the 'moderates' whose support was thus deemed vital. The government in the period 1916–17 therefore decided to 'rally the moderates' by presenting them with an acceptable ideal which would counter the extremist demand for immediate home rule.”

entirely different political context and the much larger political power of the elected personnel after independence.

We also contribute to the literature that examines India's specific democratic trajectory. It has been argued that a reason why India's democracy has been so resilient takes its roots in the specific way in which its population was progressively enfranchised during the late colonial period (Weiner, 1989; Jaffrelot, 1998; Varshney, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Others, however, argue that colonial institutions were responsible for the failures of Indian democracy (Washbrook, 1998). Shani (2017) argues that there is a fundamental rupture at Independence: while there may have been parliamentary practices under colonial rule, it is the creation of universal franchise at Independence, and in particular the very act of creating the electoral rolls which rooted democracy in India. Our finding of similar results across the reforms of 1935 and 1950 strongly suggests a role for continuity rather than any specific rupture at independence, and that universalizing suffrage has a similar political impact to partially extending the franchise – despite the large differences between the power of the elected personnel in colonial and independent settings.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the process of enfranchisement in colonial and post-colonial India, Section 3 describes our data sources and Section 4 outlines our empirical strategy. Sections 5, 6 and 7 document the results of our empirical analysis and Section 8 concludes.

## **2. Franchise Extensions in 20<sup>th</sup> Century India**

### *2.1. The Government of India Act of 1919*

The British empire in India lasted almost 200 years, beginning with the annexation of Bengal by the East India Company in 1757. Following the massive uprising of Indian soldiers against their British officers (the “Sepoy Mutiny” of 1857), the British crown took over the administration of the colony in 1858, and very

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<sup>6</sup> Weiner (1989) points out that “an impressive number of erstwhile British colonies... have maintained British style democratic institutions for all or most of their post-independence history... not a single former Dutch, Belgian or French colony currently has democratic institutions.” Varshney (1998) makes the subtle argument that “It was not the British legacy per se, but rather the strategic interactions that took place between the British authorities and national-movement leaders that laid the foundations of democracy.”

gradual reforms were undertaken to include more representation of Indians in policymaking (see Appendices B.1 and B.2 for details of these early developments). Direct elections to provincial councils were first provided by the Government of India Act of 1919, also called the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. This Act also demarcated specific policy areas (such as education and health) to be under the control of these elected provincial councils, while other areas such as land revenue, finance and law and order remained under the control of the Governors.

Suffrage under the 1919 Act was limited to men above a certain level of income or property. Our data indicate that only 2.5% of the population were eligible to vote in the first direct elections of 1921 (Table 1, panel A). All citizens who were eligible to vote were also eligible to contest the election as candidates. An earlier 1909 policy of separate electorates and separate representation on the basis of religion was retained. This meant that there were separate Muslim electoral constituencies where only Muslims could vote and only Muslims could stand as candidates. Appendix B.3 provides further details on the 1919 reform.

Our analysis will focus on the eight major provinces of British India where provincial councils were set up by the reforms of 1919: Assam, Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, Bombay, Central Provinces & Berar, Madras, Punjab and the United Provinces. Provincial council elections were held in 1921, 1923, 1926 and 1930. However, several of these were affected by political parties' boycotts. The Indian National Congress declined to participate in the 1921 elections, since Mohandas Gandhi had launched a non-cooperation movement in August of that year. In 1923, after a fierce internal dispute over whether to boycott or not, many Congressmen participated under the banner of the Swaraj Party, with the aim of undermining the working of the ministries from within. The Swarajists did win a considerable number of seats on the provincial councils, and continued to participate in the 1926 elections despite experiencing some internal splits. In 1930, Gandhi launched a second Civil Disobedience movement six months before the elections were conducted, and Congress again boycotted these elections, leading to low voter turnout and a high fraction of uncontested seats.

Because the 1930 elections were greatly affected by boycotts, most of our analysis of the 1935 enfranchisement reform will compare the 1926 election to that of 1937, omitting the 1930 election. We show that results are similar when comparing the 1937 election to 1930.

## *2.2. The Government of India Act of 1935: Partial Franchise Extension*

Through the 1920s, many political parties and prominent Indian individuals provided their own reports and views about constitutional changes, and two Round Table Conferences were held by the Viceroy to consult with Indian representatives. After much negotiation, the principle of federation was agreed upon, as well as continued separate communal representation for Muslims. Representation for lower caste Hindus was to be ensured by setting aside seats for them, but without any provision for separate electorates. All of these provisions were finally codified in the Government of India Act of 1935.

The Act of 1935 conferred full policy autonomy on provincial councils, in contrast to prior reforms that had reserved some subjects to the sole control of the Governor. The Governor was now obliged to act on the advice of the ministers, except in matters of “grave menace to peace or tranquillity” or “safeguarding the interests of minorities.” The provincial legislative councils were expanded (and renamed Legislative Assemblies) and the bigger provinces were provided bicameral legislatures.

The franchise was considerably expanded in several ways. First, in most provinces, the property thresholds were lowered considerably (see Appendix Table A1 for details of suffrage requirements in the 1919 and 1935 Acts). For instance, the minimum thresholds for voter eligibility in Bengal under the 1919 Act included at least Rs 1-8-0 in municipal taxes<sup>7</sup> and fees, Rs 1 in public works cess, Rs 2 in chaukidari tax or occupying a house valued at Rs 150. These thresholds were reduced considerably in the 1935 Act to 8 annas, 8 annas, 6 annas and Rs 42 respectively. Given that there was little net inflation over this period, this amounted to reductions of greater than 50% in the asset thresholds required for voter eligibility. Second, suffrage was also extended in some provinces to educated persons or literate women. Third, women who

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<sup>7</sup> Monetary amounts expressed as rupees, annas and paisa. There were 16 annas to a rupee and 4 paisa to an anna.

were wives or widows of qualified male voters (with higher property thresholds than required for male voting) were also allowed to vote.

As a result, the nationwide fraction of enfranchised electors increased to 11.7% in the provincial elections of 1937, though the figures varied considerably across provinces and across districts within the same province (see the map in Figure 1). These differences are driven both by differences in the voting requirements across provinces, and by differences in the distribution of assets, incomes and education levels across districts.

### *2.3 Post-1935 Political Developments*

There was widespread participation by voters and political parties in the provincial elections of 1936-37. The Indian National Congress formed governments in eight out of 11 provinces. However, all the Congress ministries resigned in October 1939, in protest against Viceroy Linlithgow's announcement of India's entry into World War II without any consultation from Indian representatives. This extremely short tenure of the representatives elected after franchise extension makes it difficult for us to examine the policy consequences of the 1935 reform. However, there is evidence that the short-lived Congress ministries formed after the 1936-37 elections made concerted efforts in implementing their policy agendas. Education stood out as one of the main areas where the efforts of the ministries were concentrated. In Bombay, the government passed a bill that made provisions for the "better management and control of primary schools," instituted a board of education to deal with the problem of adult illiteracy in the province and provided special educational grants to disadvantaged groups. In Bihar, a mass literacy movement was initiated that "made good progress with the help of about 14,000 volunteers drawn from the intelligentsia of the province." The government in United Provinces financed the construction of "a network of 960 adult schools, 760 circulating libraries and 3000 reading rooms". The Orissa government provided funds for a literacy campaign and library movement across all villages, and also abolished fees in public primary schools. We will therefore conduct an analysis of education spending as a key outcome (Indian National Congress, 1939).

The movements for Indian independence continued, with the Congress launching the “Quit India” movement in 1942; many Congress leaders were jailed for their participation in this event (Bhavnani and Jha (2018) document the dynamics of citizen participation in this movement). After the end of World War II, it was clear to many that India would not remain a British colony for much longer. Elections to provincial and central legislatures were held in December 1945-January 1946, with all major parties participating.

#### *2.4. Party Politics in the Colonial Period*

The political environment, as related to both parties and policy issues, differed markedly in the period after the 1935 Reform Act. Prior to the 1935 Reform Act, the elections to Provincial Legislatures were dominated by social and economic elites who used their personal influence to obtain votes for themselves as opposed to subscribing to a political party’s platform. Termed as “Moderates” by the British administration these elites were willing to work with the colonial state machinery in the task of government. A quote from a candidate who was elected to the 1920 Madras Legislature nicely sums up the personalized nature of politics of the era:

“The general politics of press and platform hardly affect voting. The landlord, the merchant, and the lawyer have theory clientele, and every man has his tribe, clan or creed behind him who follow with sheepish fidelity.” (Times of India, 1923)

An important factor behind the non-party based politics of the pre-1935 Reform Act era was the absence from the political scene of the Indian National Congress, the only political party of the time that had a national presence. As mentioned earlier, the Congress boycotted many of the elections held in the 1920s.

There was a profound shift in the structure of political mobilization from individuals to political parties by the time the first elections were held under the 1935 Reform Act in 1937. Such a shift was brought about by a combination of factors. First, the rise of anti-colonial movements from the Middle East to Asia generated a wave of popular excitement amongst the electorate that brought the question of independence

from colonial rule to the forefront (Times of India, 1937a). This meant that local interests that had previously been a widespread feature of electoral politics were now subsumed by the national struggle for independence. Second, the Congress decided to contest the elections on an all-India scale for the first time in India's constitutional history. The entry of Congress into the elections emphasized the importance of party organization and further reinforced the shift in the electorate's attention away from local issues. Finally, the schism between Hindu and Muslim electorates had morphed into political debates increasingly framed along communal lines. Again, this diverted the attention of the electorate from local issues toward broader communal concerns.

The main beneficiary of this shift was the Congress whose nationalist agenda, organizational capacity and anti-communal stance made it attractive for much of the electorate seeking an independent and united India.<sup>11</sup> The electoral success of Congress in 1937 was also built in part on voter disaffection with previous Provincial Governments that were seen as ineffectual and corrupt. The party's consistent portrayal of previous administrations "as the cause of India's social and economic ills had the effect of defeating many of those candidates, including Ministers, whose previous record had found them in association with the Provincial Governments." In the United Provinces "the widespread belief that the National Agriculturist Party was essentially a Government party contributed to its downfall." In Madras the fact that the Justice Party had "held office for several years contributed to their defeat, the Congress victory being a natural democratic reaction to a party long in power." (Times of India, 1937b)

The Congress Party built upon its success in the 1937 elections and further solidified its grip over the Legislative Assemblies in the 1945 elections. However, its success was limited in the Muslim majority provinces where the Muslim League emerged as a dominant political force for the first time in Indian political history. The issue of Pakistan and the partition of the subcontinent took center stage during the 1945 election campaigns. On this issue, Congress declared that "in this election petty issues do not count

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<sup>11</sup> A Times newspaper column from 15 March 1937 identifies the sentimental regard felt by the electorate 'for a movement which has focused and fostered the national aims' and 'intensive and thorough party organization' as factors contributing to Congress's popularity.

nor do individuals, nor sectarian cries-only one thing counts; the freedom and independence of our Motherland,” (Azad, 1988, p.132) while the leader of the Muslim League, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, stated that “if the Muslim verdict is against Pakistan, I will stand down.” (Zaidi, 1970, p.272) In such a febrile political atmosphere all local interests were set aside and the elections essentially became a referendum on the partition of British India.

### *2.5. The Indian Constitution of 1950: Universal Adult Suffrage*

In 1947, India ceased to be a British colony and was partitioned into the two new nations of India and Pakistan. Partition resulted in one of the largest, most rapid and most violent migrations in human history (Khwaja, Mian and Bharadwaj, 2008). The first provincial elections in independent India were held in 1951, following the adoption of a new constitution in 1950.<sup>15</sup> This constitution established India as a secular democratic republic, and universal suffrage for all citizens aged 21 or older was secured under Article 326. Consequently, the ratio of registered voters to total population increased dramatically to 49.1% in the provincial elections of 1951 and 1952 (Table 1, panel A). Reserved seats were retained for members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,<sup>16</sup> but there were no more reservations for women under the new constitution<sup>17</sup>. There were also no provisions for separate electorates on any basis. In 1989, the minimum age to vote was reduced to 18 years by the 61st Amendment to the Indian constitution.

Emerging from colonial rule, the Congress Party transformed itself from a broad-based nationalist movement into the dominant political party of the nation, winning a national legislative majority in the 1951 elections and also becoming the largest party in every state legislature. In most states, Congress remained “the largest party—in terms of both votes and seats—for the first 30 post-independence years”

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<sup>15</sup> Direct elections were held to provincial assemblies in the early 1950s in Pakistan, but the country was affected by several interventions by the military in the political process, culminating in a military coup in 1958. Owing to these political uncertainties, our analysis excludes electoral data from Pakistan after 1947.

<sup>16</sup> The Scheduled Castes are communities that have historically been at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Scheduled Tribes include communities traditionally outside the Hindu caste system. These communities were provided with a variety of affirmative action policies in the 1950 constitution.

<sup>17</sup> Reservations for women were introduced at the village and district level councils by a constitutional amendment in 1993. A bill proposing one-third reservation for women in state and national legislatures was passed by the Upper House of Parliament in 2010, but has not yet been passed by the Lower House.

(Ziegfeld and Tudor, 2017). Several factors contributed to Congress's dominance of politics during this period, including its role in the anticolonial nationalist movement (Tudor, 2013), ideologically centrist positioning as the party of national consensus (Kothari, 1964; Riker, 1976), incorporation of broad swathes of society into its ranks (Kothari, 1964; Chandra, 2004), recruitment of local notables (Bayly, 1975; Sisson, 1972), and strategic use of patronage (Weiner, 1967). Given this dominance in the pre- and post-Independence period, we track the share of winners from Congress as our main measure of party-level political competition.

### **3. Data and Construction of Key Variables**

#### *3.1. Data Sources*

We collected and digitized archival data on enfranchisement and election outcomes from the “Returns Showing the Results of Elections in India” published after each election during the colonial era. (India Office, 1921, 1924, 1927, 1931 and 1937; Government of India, 1948). These reports cover the elections to provincial assemblies in the colonial period, namely those of 1921, 1923, 1926, 1930, 1937 and 1945. Data for the post-colonial state assembly elections of 1951, 1955 and 1957 were obtained from the official election reports of the Election Commission of India for elections in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

The election reports are somewhat inconsistent in the variables they report. All of them report the number of registered voters, the number of votes cast and the number of candidates in each constituency. Colonial era reports prior to 1937 do not report names of non-winning candidates or party affiliations, and data on winner names is also incomplete. We used supplementary sources of information to create a full panel of election winners' names over time (see Appendix C for list of sources). Vote shares and vote margins are consistently available only in the post-colonial data. Only 10-12% of candidate names from the colonial period mention education or occupation and the fraction varies considerably across provinces and

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<sup>18</sup> We thank Francesca Jensenius for sharing these digitized data with us.

years. The extent of missing data on this precludes systematic analysis on the characteristics of candidates. Even such partial data is not available in the post-colonial election reports.

### *3.2. Data Aggregation to District Level*

To track political outcomes over time, we face the issue of constructing geographically stable units over time. Electoral constituency boundaries changed over time, and both the enfranchisement reforms we examine greatly expanded the number of elected representatives. As a consequence, we created district-level aggregate variables, since these administrative district boundaries remained relatively stable over time. In the few cases in which new districts were created, we aggregate them back to their previous boundaries. We consistently perform our analysis at the level of the 1921 district boundaries. Details of this aggregation procedure are provided in Appendix C.

### *3.3. Measures of Enfranchisement*

Our main explanatory variable is the enfranchisement rate, which is defined as the number of registered electors in the district divided by its total population. The district level number of registered voters is obtained by aggregating constituency-level figures, using the procedures described in Appendix C. For district-level population data, we use the censuses of 1921, 1931 and 1951 (the 1941 census quality and coverage were compromised by the constraints of wartime), assigning the previous census-year population to each election year. Using this measure, we find that only 3% of a district population was eligible to vote in 1926, and this fraction increased to 11.7% in the 1937 election (Table 1, panel A). The introduction of universal adult franchise in 1950 also had a huge impact, raising the average fraction of enfranchised population in a district to 48% in the 1951 elections.

We construct enfranchisement measures using two alternative population estimates. The first is an interpolated population figure in the denominator of the enfranchisement measure. For districts that experienced abnormal increases or decreases in population due to the 1947 partition, such extrapolated population figures for 1957 can be erroneous. The second is an age-adjusted population figure. While the best measure would be to use the population aged 21 or older, we face several data constraints in doing

so.<sup>19</sup> Despite the measurement constraints, we find that both of these alternative measures show similar four-fold increases in enfranchisement rates after both the 1935 and 1950 reforms (Table 1, panel A).

A potential source of mismeasurement in our data arises from the possibility that not all eligible voters may be actually registered to vote. An electoral roll was prepared for every constituency on which the names of all persons appearing to be entitled to be registered as electors was to be entered. Once prepared, the roll was to be published in the constituency together with a notice specifying the mode and time period within which any claims by individuals who felt that they should be included in the roll (or any persons feeling they should be excluded from the roll) were to be submitted to the revising authorities. The responsibilities for the preparation of the roll, the timing of its publication, the procedure for addressing claims regarding the electoral roll and the constitution of the revising authorities were all left to district administration officials.

This source of mismeasurement can lead to bias in our estimates if district level registration rates are correlated with other unobservable district-specific trends that also drive the outcome. This could be the case, for instance, if districts that experienced lower (or more) political competition for any reason also promoted greater rates of registration and therefore record higher enfranchisement figures. We therefore control explicitly for such pre-reform trends as a robustness check in our estimation.

#### *3.4. Measures of Political Participation*

We track citizen political participation as voters and as candidates. Our main measure of voter participation is simply the number of citizens who voted divided by the total population. Note that if none of the newly enfranchised voters exercise their right to vote, this would not change with enfranchisement. On the other hand, if all of them chose to vote, then this measure would increase exactly as much as the enfranchisement

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<sup>19</sup> For the censuses of 1921 and 1931, we have population aged 20 and older rather than 21. The 1951 census only has district-level population above the age of 24. It also has the single-age-specific population distribution for 10% of the population, which we can extrapolate to create the population above age 21. Enfranchisement measures using these slightly different age-specific variables for 1951 have a correlation of 0.99; our analysis uses using the latter measure. We should note that age data is likely to be very poorly recorded amongst a largely illiterate population without good birth records, and in fact, these estimated populations above age 21 or 24 turn out to be *lower* than the total number of registered voters for a large number of districts in 1951.

measure. We face some measurement challenges in computing this variable: we do not observe the population of each constituency (but that of the more aggregated district) and we do not know the number of voters in a constituency when the election is unopposed in that constituency. As a consequence, we cannot exclude the constituencies with uncontested elections from our computation of the share of voters when we aggregate the data at the district level. We cannot therefore distinguish if an increase in the ratio of voters to population is due to a decrease in the number of uncontested seats in that district or to a genuine increase in the number of voters, holding the number of uncontested seats constant. We address this concern by tracking two supplementary measures, namely the fraction of uncontested seats in the constituency and the voter turnout, defined as the ratio of total votes cast in a specific election to the total number of registered voters (this explicitly excludes the uncontested seats).

We see that the population share of voters did increase after each reform, rising to 5.5% in 1937 from 0.5% in 1930, and from 4.5% to 22.2% between 1945 and 1951 (Table 1, panel B). Some of this increase could potentially be driven by the steep decline in the share of uncontested elections in both 1937 and 1951 (Table 1, panel C). For 1930, voter share of the population could be further affected by the calls for widespread boycott. Tracking voter turnout, as a share of registered voters, we see that this rises from 51% in 1926 to 57% in 1937 (with a big drop in 1930). In contrast, voter turnout declined slightly from 49% in 1945 to 46% in 1951, the first election after the institution of universal adult suffrage in 1950.

We measure the candidate participation of citizens as the number of candidates per 1000 registered voters in the district. Since the eligibility criteria were the same for voting and for candidacy, this measures what fraction of the potential candidate pool actually become candidates. As with voters, the newly eligible candidate pool may not translate into actual candidacy if there are significant informational, financial or societal barriers to becoming candidates. We also track a supplementary measure, namely the candidate-population ratio.

Both measures of candidate participation declined considerably between 1926 and 1930, reflecting the impact of the Congress-led boycott (Table 1, panels B and C). In contrast, after the franchise extension of 1935, the candidate share of the population almost tripled between 1930 and 1937 reflecting the

expansion of the potential candidate pool, but the share of registered voters who became candidates actually fell from 0.27 per 1000 registered voters in 1926 to 0.14 in 1937. This suggests that the expansion of the candidate pool did not translate to a proportionate expansion in the number of actual candidates. In a similar manner, the number of candidates per 100,000 population increased more than three-fold after the franchise extension of 1950, but the share of registered voters that become candidates fell from 0.091 per 1000 voters in 1945 to 0.077 in 1951.

### *3.5. Measures of Political Competition*

We compute three main measures of political competition: the number of candidates per seat in the district (which reflects the extent of opposition faced by those standing for election), the incumbent re-election rate and the fraction of seats won by Congress (as a measure of party competition). Data limitations prevent us from computing other measures of political competition such as the effective number of parties or the winning margin. The incumbent re-election rate is computed as the fraction of incumbent politicians who get re-elected in the next election. So “fraction of incumbents re-elected 1923” refers to the fraction of incumbent politicians (i.e. those who got elected to the provincial legislature from that district in 1921) that win re-election in 1923. Tracking specific politicians across election years is conducted via fuzzy matching combined with manual checking (see Appendix C for details). For the elections of 1937 and later, which provide data on all candidates’ names (not just the winners), we can compute a supplementary measure of incumbency advantage as the percentage of incumbents who run for re-election. We are also able to track the fraction of uncontested elections over time.

The time series suggests that the enfranchisement reforms are associated with increases in political competition. We see that the average candidate-seat ratio increased after both the franchise extensions, from 2.27 in 1926 to 2.60 in 1937 (as expected, the boycott in 1930 resulted in an unusually low candidate-seat ratio of 1.83), and from 2.22 in 1945 to 4.51 in 1951 (Table 1, panel B). The fraction of incumbents who got re-elected fell from 35% in 1926 to 13% in 1937 (note that the boycott in 1930 leads to a large increase

in incumbency advantage), and from 25% in 1945 to 16% in 1951.<sup>20</sup> Some of the decline can be attributed to incumbents not running for re-election: only 22% of previous winners run for re-election in 1951 (after franchise extension), compared to 31% in 1945 (panel C). The share of uncontested elections also decreased drastically after each reform, from 15% in 1926 to 6% in 1937, and from 26% in 1945 to 0.2% in 1951 (panel C). Turning to party-level competition, we find that the fraction of Congress winners increased from 64% in 1945 to 74% in 1951, consistent with the narrative of Congress established a nationwide dominance after Indian independence. This dominance is also reflected in the fact that the number of parties that nominate candidates for a given seat barely increased after enfranchisement, and that the Congress winners' share increased despite a decline in the Congress candidates' share.

#### 4. Empirical Strategy

We examine whether districts with larger enfranchisement increases experience larger changes in measures of political participation and competition compared to districts with smaller increases in enfranchisement. Our main regression is a first-difference specification:

$$\Delta Y_d = \alpha + \gamma \Delta \text{Enfranchisement}_d + X_d' \delta + e_d \quad (1)$$

where  $\Delta Y_d$  is the measured change in political participation or competition in district  $d$ ,  $\Delta \text{Enfranchisement}_d$  is a measure of the change in enfranchisement in district  $d$ , and  $X_d$  is a vector of district level covariates such as total population, population growth between censuses, urbanization rates, gender ratios, literacy rates, and religious mix;  $e_d$  is an error term. Due to concerns about electoral boycotts, we will compute changes between 1937 and 1926 in order to measure the impact of the 1935 reform, and show the change between 1930 and 1937 as a robustness check. For the 1950 reform, we compute the change between 1945 and 1951, and we also include the fraction of refugees in the population as an additional control in order to account for the direct effects of partition and displacement on political outcomes.

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<sup>20</sup> When we track incumbent performance directly from 1926 to 1937, we find that 15% of 1926 incumbents are re-elected in 1937, very similar to the earlier figure of 13% of 1930 incumbents who get re-elected in 1937.

This first-difference specification is equivalent to a difference-in-difference strategy using data from two periods, where we compare changes over time and across districts that experienced greater or lesser increases in enfranchisement. Since we are comparing each district to itself before and after enfranchisement, we are in effect controlling for any time-invariant characteristics of districts such as geography, prior history, length of colonial rule, land tenure systems or other institutional characteristics. Any changes induced by the reforms that are common to all districts, such as national changes in political environment or increases in the total number of representatives, are captured by the constant term  $\alpha$ .

Our regression specification would yield biased estimates if *changes* in enfranchisement rates happen to be correlated with other time-varying characteristics of the district that also affect changes in political participation or competition. We examine and control for this possibility in several ways. First, we include several district level observable characteristics  $X_d$  in our regression. Controlling for these characteristics in a first-difference specification means that we are controlling for differential trends based on these characteristics. However, there could still be trends in unobservable characteristics that are correlated with trends in our outcome variables. We therefore conduct a robustness test including the pre-reform change as an additional control variable. We also run a difference-in-difference specification using the full time series as follows:

$$Y_{dt} = \lambda_d + \Sigma \beta_t + \gamma * Post_t * \Delta Enfranchisement_d + X_{dt}' \delta + u_{dt}. \quad (2)$$

where  $\lambda_d$  is a dummy (fixed effect) for district  $d$ ,  $\beta_t$  is a dummy for election year  $t$ ,  $Post_t$  is an indicator for post-reform years and  $\Delta Enfranchisement_d$  is as defined earlier. For the 1935 reform, election years 1937 and 1945 would take on values of one for the  $Post$  dummy, while election years 1921-1930 would have a zero value. For the 1950 reform, election years 1951 and 1957 would have  $Post = 1$ , while years 1937 and 1945 would have  $Post = 0$ . The advantage of this specification is that we can include district-specific time trends in the set of control variables  $X_{dt}$ , so that we are controlling for any linearly evolving district unobservables. The disadvantage is that this specification assumes a one-time permanent effect of the

reform for all “post” years. To adjust for outcomes being correlated over time within the same district, we cluster our standard errors at the district level.

Finally, we also use the full time series in our data and show an “event study” specification:

$$Y_{dt} = \lambda_d + \Sigma \beta_t + \Sigma \gamma_t * \Delta Enfranchisement_d + X_{dt}' \delta + u_{dt} \quad (3)$$

where  $\lambda_d$  and  $\beta_t$  are as in (2) above, and  $\gamma_t$  is the election-year-specific impact of the change in enfranchisement. For the 1935 reforms, the election years included are 1921, 1923, 1926, 1930, 1937 and 1945. 1921 will be the omitted category so that the  $\gamma_t$  coefficients represent the impact of 1935-reform enfranchisement on the outcome in year  $t$ . This specification allows us to test whether the coefficients are significant prior to the reform date, which would indicate a potential problem with pre-trends. It also enables us to examine whether the effects persist after the first post-reform election. However, this specification is more demanding than (2) in terms of degrees of freedom in statistical analysis, since more coefficients need to be estimated using the same amount of data. The corresponding specification for the 1950 reform would include elections years 1937, 1945, 1951 and 1957. The omitted category in that regression would be the year 1937.

## 5. Impact of the Partial Franchise Extension of 1935 on Political Participation and Competition

### 5.1. Main Results

We find that increasing enfranchisement does not lead to equally large increases in citizen participation as voters or candidates. Table 2 shows the results of running specification (1) for the 1935 reforms, comparing the 1937 elections to that of 1926 (as the 1930 election was affected by boycotts). Our preferred specification is in column (3), where we include the district demographic controls mentioned earlier and exclude four districts that are outliers in terms of the enfranchisement variable.<sup>21</sup> We find that increasing

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<sup>21</sup> These are the districts of Almora and Ramnad, which show declines in the enfranchisement rate between 1926 to 1937, and Bombay City and Ahmedabad, which show abnormally large increases in the enfranchisement rate.

the population share of enfranchised citizens by 10 percentage points increases the voter share of the population by 4.1 percentage points. If we make the (somewhat extreme) assumption that all of the previously enfranchised voters continue to vote, this would mean that only 41% (i.e. less than half) of the newly enfranchised voters are exercising their right to vote. Similarly, a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement results in a statistically significant decline of 0.14 candidates per 1000 registered voters (Table 2, panel B, column 3).

We verify that these patterns are not driven by some pre-existing trends in these political outcome variables that just happens to coincide with high versus low enfranchisement (Table 2, panels A and B, columns 4 and 5). We show that the estimated coefficients remain similar in size and statistical significance when we directly control for pre-reform changes in the outcomes (i.e. the change between 1923 and 1926), as well as when we use a difference-in-difference specification with district-specific linear time trends as in specification (3).

We examine the medium-term effects of the 1935 reforms by examining the changes between 1937 and 1945. In particular, if we think that the relatively muted effects on citizen participation result from a lack of familiarity with the electoral system, we would expect the participation outcomes to show further increases over time as citizens acquire political knowledge and experience. We find, however, that this is not the case: places with greater increases in enfranchisement due to the 1935 reform actually exhibit a statistically smaller growth in the voter share of population between 1937 and 1945. While these places do show a larger increase in the candidates per 1000 voters, the coefficient is roughly one-third as large as the original negative coefficient suggesting that the subsequent increase in candidacy is not enough to offset the original decline (Table 2, panels A and B, column 6).

A similar pattern can be observed in the graphical representation of the election-year-specific impact of enfranchisement, obtained from running specification (3). Figure 2A shows that the voter share of the population did not increase prior to the reform, and increases sharply thereafter. Figure 2B shows a slight decreasing trend for candidates per 1000 voters prior to 1935, but a much bigger decline in the 1937 elections with some recovery in the 1945 election. Note that the points on this graph represent how much

outcomes change with respect to 1921 as the omitted year, so that the main effects in Table 2 (column 3) would be equivalent to taking the difference between the point estimate for 1937 and the point estimate for 1926 on this graph. Similarly, the medium term effect would be the difference between the point estimate for 1945 and that for 1937.

Turning to measures of political competition, we find that enfranchisement does not have any statistically significant impact. A 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement results in 0.21 additional candidates per seat and a 1.5 percentage point decline in the fraction of incumbents getting re-elected (Table 2, panels C and D, column 3). Not surprisingly, these remain statistically insignificant when controlling for the pre-reform change in outcomes or controlling for district-specific trends (columns 4 and 5). Interestingly, we see decreases in political competition when we consider the medium term effects: places that experienced greater increases in enfranchisement show a bigger decline in the candidate-seat ratio between 1937 and 1945, and a larger increase in the fraction of incumbents getting re-elected (column 6). The event-study graph in Figure 2D shows that this is mainly because the point estimate for 1937 is negative (in line with our main estimate of Table 2, column 3) and there is an increase in incumbency advantage in 1945, bringing it back to 1923 levels.

### *5.2. Robustness Checks*

We conduct several robustness checks for our results, shown in Appendix Table A3. First, we show that our results remain similar in size and significance when we use the interpolated census population to calculate enfranchisement rates rather than the previous census population (column 1). Our results also remain statistically significant when we use the age-specific population as the denominator to calculate enfranchisement rates (column 2). Not surprisingly, these estimates are smaller in magnitude than our baseline results in Table 2, simply because the enfranchisement measures are systematically larger when using age-specific population as the denominator rather than total population. In fact, with this measure of enfranchisement, we also see a marginally significant increase in the number of candidates per seat.

Similarly, our results remain similar in size and significance when controlling for the change in the number of seats in each district (column 3), when we examine changes between 1930 and 1937 instead of

the changes between 1926 and 1937 (column 4), and when we drop districts that later became part of Pakistan (column 5).

A related concern in our statistical analysis may be the presence of district-specific unobserved characteristics that drive both changes in enfranchisement as well as changes in political participation and competition, despite the fact that we have controlled for several demographic characteristics of the district. One way to control for such omitted variables problems is to use an instrumental variable, namely something that changes district level enfranchisement but is uncorrelated with district-specific characteristics. In our setting, one key source of variation in enfranchisement rates across districts is the wealth threshold and other rules for enfranchisement chosen by the provincial government, which were usually uniform over the whole province with only a few exceptions (see Appendix Table A1). While this may not be fully uncorrelated with district characteristics, it does provide a somewhat exogenous reason for enfranchisement rates to vary across districts. Accordingly, we reran our empirical specification using province dummies as instruments for district-level enfranchisement changes.<sup>22</sup> Again, we find the same results as before: a less-than-proportional increase in the voter share of the population, a significant decline in the number of candidates as a share of registered voters and no significant effect on candidate-seat ratios or the fraction of incumbents getting re-elected (Appendix Table A3, column 6).

### *5.3. Supplementary Outcomes*

Our main conclusions regarding the effect of enfranchisement on political participation and competition do not change when we examine alternative measures. We see that a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement results in a statistically significant 7.32 percentage point decline in voter turnout, measured as the share of registered voters who turn out to vote (Appendix Table A4, panel A, column 3). This is consistent with the result that enfranchisement results in a less-than-proportional increase in the voter share

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<sup>22</sup> We find a strong and significant “first stage” for this regression: the F-statistic for the province dummies as predictors of enfranchisement change is 13.58, even after controlling for district demographics and pre-reform changes in political outcomes. We recognize that this instrumental variables strategy is potentially subject to a failure of the “exclusion restriction,” namely that province characteristics may affect political outcomes through channels other than enfranchisement policies. Hence, this is shown only as a robustness check and not as our main specification.

of the population. We also see a significant increase in the candidate share of the total population, but the magnitude of this is fairly small: a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement (i.e. in the potential candidate pool) results in 0.33 more candidates per 100,000 population (Panel B, column 3). As before, the results are robust to controlling for the pre-reform change in outcomes as well as to the inclusion of district-specific time trends (Panels A and B, columns 4 and 5), and show no significant increase in the medium term either (column 6). Our supplementary measure of political competition—the fraction of uncontested seats—shows no significant relationship with our measure of enfranchisement (Appendix Table A4, panel C). This is consistent with the results on political competition in Table 2.

## **6. The Impact of 1950 Universal Suffrage Reform on Political Participation and Competition**

### *6.1. Main Results*

We examine the impact on political participation and competition of the adoption of the 1950 constitution that granted suffrage to all adult citizens of India. This was a very large expansion of the franchise, increasing the fraction of enfranchised population in a district by 36.3 percentage points on average, compared to the last pre-independence election of 1945 (Table 1, Panel A). In theory, the impact of such a large extension can be quite different from the earlier expansion of 8.8 percentage points, both because of the different characteristics of those enfranchised by each reform and because of the different political contexts in which these franchise extensions took place. Our main regression specification is still based on equation (1), but with changes now being measured between the elections of 1945 and 1951.

The impact of the 1950 reform on political outcomes is similar to that of the 1935 reform. On citizen participation, we find that the extension of the franchise to all adults results in a statistically significant but less-than-proportional increase in voting and a statistically significant decrease in candidates per 1000 voters. A 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement due to the 1950 reform results in only a 3 percentage point increase in the voter share of the population, according to our preferred estimates (Table 3, panel A, column 3). A similar calculation suggests that a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement results in 0.011 fewer candidates per 1000 registered voters (Panel B, column 3).

These estimates remain similar in size and significance when we control for the pre-reform change in outcomes (i.e. the change from 1937 to 1945), showing that the relationship with enfranchisement cannot be attributed to differential pre-existing trends (Panels A and B, column 4). The estimates also remain similar in size when controlling for district-specific time trends, though the estimate for the candidate-voter ratio loses statistical significance, when we control for district-specific time trends using the difference-in-difference specification (Panels A and B, column 5). The medium term effects, namely the change from 1951 to 1957, are not larger than the immediate effects, showing that citizen participation does not pick up over time in heavily enfranchised districts; in fact, the trends in voter participation are somewhat worsened (Table 3, panels A and B, column 6). The event-study graphs in Figure 3A and 3B confirm that our estimates are not confounded by any pre-existing significant differences in outcomes between areas with higher and lower enfranchisement.

Similar to the effects of the 1935 reform, we find that increased enfranchisement does not result in a proportional increase in political competition. A 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement increases the candidate-seat ratio by a statistically insignificant 0.17, increases the fraction of incumbents getting re-elected by 6 percentage points (statistically significant at the 10% level) and reduces the fraction of Congress winners by an insignificant 1.5 percentage points (Table 3, panels C-E, column 3). There are also no significant effects of enfranchisement on measures of political competition in the medium term (column 6). Our event study graphs in Figures 3C-3E are consistent with this lack of any effect of the enfranchisement reform on political competition.

### *6.2. Robustness Tests and Supplementary Outcomes*

We conduct a number of robustness checks for the relationships documented in Table 3: using alternative measures of enfranchisement (using interpolated census population or estimated age-specific population as the denominator rather than the previous census population), controlling for the increase in the number of seats and dropping the provinces of Punjab and Bengal to avoid any confounding effects of partition-related

deaths or displacement.<sup>23</sup> The results are shown in Appendix Table A5. We find that our results are mostly robust to these changes in our specifications, with the exception of the change in the candidate-seat ratio which becomes positive and statistically significant when controlling for the change in the number of seats or when we drop Punjab and Bengal.

In Appendix Table A6, we show results for supplementary political outcomes. The results for voter turnout show that areas with higher enfranchisement increases show a bigger decline in voter turnout, which is measured as the fraction of registered voters who actually voted (our preferred estimates are in panel A, column 3). This is completely consistent with our less-than-proportional increase documented earlier for the voter share of the population. Our supplementary variable of candidate participation, namely the number of candidates per 100,000 population shows a significant increase of about 0.75 for every 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement (Appendix Table A6, panel B, column 3). We should note that this amounts to only 68% of the mean value in 1945, while enfranchisement increased four-fold between 1945 and 1951; it is thus consistent with our finding in Table 3 that candidates as a share of registered voters declined significantly.

Turning to supplementary measures of political competition, we find that enfranchisement led to decreases in some of these measures. Specifically, while we see no impact of enfranchisement on the fraction of uncontested seats (similar to the 1935 reforms), places with bigger increases in enfranchisement have a significant increase in the fraction of incumbents who run for re-election and a significant decline in the average number of parties contesting each seat. A 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement results in a 9.2 percentage point increase in the fraction of incumbents that run for re-election (Appendix Table A6, panel D, column 3), which is 29% of the 1945 mean value. Table 3 showed that the fraction of incumbents winning increased by 5.92 percentage points for the same 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement, indicating that about 64% of these re-running incumbents managed to retain their seats.

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<sup>23</sup> Unlike the case of the 1935 reforms, individual states had no discretion in framing enfranchisement rules since all places were required to have universal adult franchise. The conceptual basis for conducting an instrumental variables estimation based on province fixed effects is therefore much weaker, and the variation it would rely on is much smaller, since it would depend only on initial enfranchisement levels.

Similarly, a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement decreases the number of parties per seat by 0.17 (panel E, column 3), which is 23% of the 1945 mean value. Overall, we find no evidence that enfranchisement increases political competition, and some evidence that it may increase incumbency advantage both at the individual and the party level.

## **7. Policy Effects of Enfranchisement**

### *7.1. Education Spending after the 1935 Reform*

Delineating the policy effects of the 1935 enfranchisement reform is hampered due to historical events and data limitations. The Congress-led ministries that were elected in 1937 resigned in 1939, in protest against Viceroy Linlithgow's unilateral announcement of India's entry into World War II, and policy decisions after 1939 are likely to be confounded by the effects of wartime constraints. This gives us a relatively short time frame to assess the impact of the 1939 reform. While we were able to obtain some data on education spending, data on other related variables, such as the availability of public schools, is only available from the post-independence period.

We nevertheless conducted a first-difference analysis using data on per capita education spending at the district level, which we were able to obtain from the annual issues of the "Report on the Working of District Boards." We were able to access these reports for the provinces of Assam, Bihar, Central Provinces and United Provinces for the years 1931-1940, though there are some missing years for each provincial series. Using the period 1931-1934 as "pre-enfranchisement" and 1937-1940 as "post-enfranchisement" years, we calculate the difference in the per capita spending on education and regress it on district level enfranchisement increases as in equation (1). We find that districts that experienced larger increases in enfranchisement also experienced larger increases in per capita spending, though the effects are somewhat imprecisely estimated given the limited nature of the data. In particular, we find that districts with a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement had 0.01 rupees per capita higher education spending, which

is 5 percent of the pre-1935 mean.<sup>25</sup> This estimate is computed after controlling for demographics and removing outliers, and is statistically significant at the 10% level of significance (Table 4, panel A, column 3). Most of this increase is attributable to the increase in primary school spending rather than middle school spending: while these coefficients are not statistically significant, we see that the primary school spending coefficient is almost the same size as the overall coefficient while the coefficient on middle school spending is much smaller and negatively signed (Table 4, panels B and C, column 3). While these results are not fully conclusive, they are consistent with the narrative evidence of elected provincial councils prioritizing education as a policy area (see Section 2.3). Our quantitative analysis then suggests that such prioritization of education was more likely to happen in areas that saw greater increases in enfranchisement.

### *7.2. Access to Schools After the 1950 Reform*

District-level expenditure data is not available for the post-independence period. To track the progress of education provision, we therefore track the number of villages that had at least one school, obtaining data from the 1951 and 1961 district census handbooks. We are able to obtain these data for the provinces of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, Punjab and the United Provinces. Given the incompleteness of these data, this analysis should be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive.

As above, we regress the change in the fraction of villages with primary schools (between 1951 and 1961) on the change in enfranchisement induced by the 1950 reform. We find a positive and statistically significant relationship between these two variables in our preferred specification that includes controls for district demographics and excludes certain outliers (Table 5, column 3). Our results thus suggest that increasing enfranchisement does result in better education provision, even though the reform does not increase measures of political competition. This suggests that even if many newly enfranchised voters do not exercise their voting rights, the possibility of them doing so can increase government accountability.

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<sup>25</sup> Chaudhary (2010) estimates that a 10% increase in 1911 per capita education spending results in a 2.6 percentage point increase in literacy rates for individuals aged 5-10 years. Based on this, our estimates would mean that a 10 percentage point increase in enfranchisement could result in a 1.3 percentage point increase in literacy rates. This is quite large, since 1931 literacy in the 5-10 age group was only 5.9% for males and 2.0% for females.

## 7. Conclusions

We study two major extensions of the right to vote in twentieth-century India. Our study differs from prior ones in examining suffrage extensions in both a colonial and a post-colonial setting. The colonial setting means that we are in a context of colonial elites extending suffrage rights to native elites rather than a context of a redistribution of political rights from native elites to other emerging native groups. It also meant that the elected personnel under colonial rule had less political power than those elected after independence. Our study is also situated in a much poorer country, compared to previous studies on the U.K. or the U.S.

We create a unique database of provincial election results in India between 1921 and 1957, and document three important findings. First, extending the franchise results in a less-than-proportional increase in citizen participation as voters or candidates. Franchise extension also has no significant effects on measures of electoral competition such as the fraction of incumbents who win re-election, the number of candidates or parties contesting a given seat, the share of uncontested electoral races and the Congress party's share of winners. Second, despite the small increase in citizen participation and the lack of political competition, districts that had larger increases in enfranchisement also experience greater education provision by provincial governments. Third, the results are similar for both the 1935 and the 1950 reforms, suggesting that suffrage extensions can act to improve government accountability across a range of political contexts. We hope, therefore, that future work can examine the relationship between franchise extension and state investments in public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and health clinics that are commonly associated with political patronage. There is also scope for future research to extend the analysis in this paper to other cases of suffrage extensions under the umbrella of colonial governments to establish the external validity of its results.

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**Table 1: Summary Statistics of Key Variables**

|   | <b>1921</b> | <b>1923</b> | <b>1926</b> | <b>1930</b> | <b>1937</b> | <b>1945</b> | <b>1951</b> | <b>1957</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| # districts   | 202         | 202         | 202         | 202         | 202         | 202         | 167         | 167         |
| # seats per district  | 2.6         | 2.6         | 2.6         | 2.6         | 6.5         | 6.5         | 12.9        | 13.3        |
| <b><u>Panel A: Measures of enfranchisement</u></b>                                      |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| % enfranchised (previous census pop in denominator)                                     | 0.025       | 0.027       | 0.030       | 0.029       | 0.117       | 0.119       | 0.482       | 0.535       |
| % enfranchised (interpolated pop in denominator)  | 0.025       | 0.027       | 0.028       | 0.029       | 0.105       | 0.126       | 0.482       | 0.500       |
| % enfranchised (age-specific pop in denominator)  | 0.047       | 0.051       | 0.056       | 0.059       | 0.241       | 0.322       | 1.063       | 1.178       |
| <b><u>Panel B: Main outcomes (political participation and competition)</u></b>          |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Voters as a share of total population   | 0.005       | 0.009       | 0.012       | 0.005       | 0.055       | 0.045       | 0.222       | 0.247       |
| Candidates per 1000 registered voters   | 0.361       | 0.333       | 0.270       | 0.191       | 0.144       | 0.091       | 0.077       | 0.049       |
| Candidate-seat ratio  | 2.81        | 2.46        | 2.27        | 1.83        | 2.60        | 2.22        | 4.51        | 3.11        |
| Fraction of incumbents who get re-elected   |             | 0.234       | 0.347       | 0.352       | 0.129       | 0.248       | 0.162       | 0.314       |
| Alternative measure of above (comparing 1937 to 1926)                                   |             |             |             |             | 0.153       |             |             |             |
| Fraction of winners from Congress   |             |             |             |             | 0.512       | 0.643       | 0.741       | 0.656       |
| <b><u>Panel C: Supplementary outcomes (political participation and competition)</u></b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Voter turnout, as a share of registered voters  | 0.277       | 0.431       | 0.512       | 0.332       | 0.569       | 0.492       | 0.463       | 0.491       |
| Candidates per 100,000 population   | 0.726       | 0.658       | 0.585       | 0.459       | 1.384       | 1.098       | 3.701       | 2.440       |
| Fraction of uncontested seats   | 0.249       | 0.144       | 0.149       | 0.459       | 0.058       | 0.258       | 0.002       | 0.008       |
| Fraction of incumbents who ran for re-election  |             |             |             |             | 0.256       | 0.310       | 0.219       | 0.445       |
| Alternative measure of above (comparing 1937 to 1926)                                   |             |             |             |             | 0.234       |             |             |             |
| Number of parties (with candidates) per seat  |             |             |             |             |             | 0.729       | 0.737       | 0.495       |

Notes: Data for 1951 and 1957 exclude districts that became part of Pakistan after 1947. Voter turnout is undefined for uncontested constituencies. "Age-specific population" refers to population aged 20 and above for years prior to 1947, and to population aged 21 and above for 1951 and 1957 obtained by extrapolation from a 10% single-age sample.

**Table 2: Impact of 1935 Reforms on Political Participation and Competition**

|   | 1926 to 1937        | <u>Controls</u><br>1926 to 1937 | <u>Remove Outliers</u><br>1926 to 1937 | <u>Control for pre-reform</u><br><u>change in outcome</u><br>1926 to 1937 | <u>Control for district-</u><br><u>specific trends</u><br>DID estimate | <u>Medium term effect</u><br>1937 to 1945 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
|   | (1)                 | (2)                             | (3)                                    | (4)   | (5)  | (6)                                       |
| <b>Panel A: Change in voter share of total population</b>           |                     |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 0.245***<br>(0.058) | 0.294***<br>(0.059)             | 0.411***<br>(0.034)                    | 0.416***<br>(0.033)   | 0.359***<br>(0.069)  | -0.137**<br>(0.063)                       |
| Observations  | 202                 | 202                             | 198                                    | 198   | 1188   | 198                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.245               | 0.354                           | 0.479                                  | 0.518   | 0.887  | 0.373                                     |
| <b>Panel B: Change in candidates per 1000 registered voters</b>     |                     |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | -0.858**<br>(0.343) | -1.391***<br>(0.441)            | -1.423***<br>(0.522)                   | -1.401***<br>(0.515)  | -1.876***<br>(0.491)   | 0.494***<br>(0.145)                       |
| Observations  | 202                 | 202                             | 198                                    | 198   | 1188   | 198                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.027               | 0.093                           | 0.106                                  | 0.113   | 0.781  | 0.314                                     |
| <b>Panel C: Change in candidate-seat ratio</b>                      |                     |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | -1.242<br>(1.434)   | 0.692<br>(1.395)                | 2.086<br>(1.744)                       | 1.825<br>(1.473)  | -0.370<br>(2.846)  | -2.686*<br>(1.595)                        |
| Observations  | 202                 | 202                             | 198                                    | 198   | 1188   | 198                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.004               | 0.111                           | 0.101                                  | 0.317   | 0.505  | 0.316                                     |
| <b>Panel D: Change in fraction of incumbents who get re-elected</b> |                     |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 0.105<br>(0.672)    | -0.378<br>(0.878)               | -0.152<br>(1.103)                      | -0.285<br>(0.895)   | -1.130<br>(1.458)  | 1.545**<br>(0.745)                        |
| Observations  | 202                 | 202                             | 198                                    | 198   | 990  | 198                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.000               | 0.040                           | 0.041                                  | 0.330   | 0.468  | 0.148                                     |
| Controls  | N                   | Y                               | Y                                      | Y   | Y  | Y   |
| Remove outliers   | N                   | N                               | Y                                      | Y   | Y  | Y   |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*indicates statistical significance at 1%, \*\*at 5%, \*at 10%. Controls include district population, literacy, urbanization, gender ratio, fraction of Hindus and Christians, and fraction of population employed in agriculture in 1921, and population growth rates between 1921 and 1931. Difference-in-difference estimates based on specification (2) in the paper.

**Table 3: Impact of 1950 Reforms on Political Participation and Competition**

|   | 1945 to 1951         | <u>Controls</u><br>1945 to 1951 | <u>Remove Outliers</u><br>1945 to 1951 | <u>Control for pre-reform</u><br><u>change in outcome</u><br>1945 to 1951 | <u>Control for district-</u><br><u>specific trends</u><br>DID estimate | <u>Medium term effect</u><br>1951 to 1957 |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
|   | (1)                  | (2)                             | (3)                                    | (4)   | (5)  | (6)                                       |
| <b>Panel A: Change in voter share of total population</b>           |                      |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 0.269***<br>(0.044)  | 0.312***<br>(0.034)             | 0.296***<br>(0.049)                    | 0.298***<br>(0.051)   | 0.268***<br>(0.073)  | -0.107***<br>(0.037)                      |
| Observations  | 167                  | 167                             | 165                                    | 165   | 660  | 165                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.188                | 0.333                           | 0.276                                  | 0.294   | 0.973  | 0.321                                     |
| <b>Panel B: Change in candidates per 1000 registered voters</b>     |                      |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | -0.102***<br>(0.038) | -0.091***<br>(0.032)            | -0.112***<br>(0.041)                   | -0.097**<br>(0.046)   | -0.101<br>(0.086)  | -0.020<br>(0.026)                         |
| Observations  | 167                  | 167                             | 165                                    | 165   | 660  | 165                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.037                | 0.203                           | 0.206                                  | 0.229   | 0.905  | 0.384                                     |
| <b>Panel C: Change in candidate-seat ratio</b>                      |                      |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 1.213<br>(1.465)     | 2.436**<br>(1.182)              | 1.725<br>(1.440)                       | 1.574<br>(1.343)  | 0.195<br>(3.293)   | -0.760<br>(1.299)                         |
| Observations  | 167                  | 167                             | 165                                    | 165   | 660  | 165                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.006                | 0.204                           | 0.198                                  | 0.322   | 0.787  | 0.312                                     |
| <b>Panel D: Change in fraction of incumbents who get re-elected</b> |                      |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 0.733***<br>(0.280)  | 0.806***<br>(0.297)             | 0.592*<br>(0.317)                      | 0.308<br>(0.297)  | 0.911<br>(0.627)   | -0.404<br>(0.354)                         |
| Observations  | 167                  | 167                             | 165                                    | 165   | 660  | 165                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.055                | 0.163                           | 0.158                                  | 0.352   | 0.622  | 0.080                                     |
| <b>Panel E: Change in fraction of Congress winners</b>              |                      |                                 |  |   |  |   |
| Change in % enfranchised  | -0.242<br>(0.365)    | -0.195<br>(0.304)               | -0.146<br>(0.393)                      | -0.139<br>(0.395)   | -0.131<br>(0.576)  | -0.013<br>(0.314)                         |
| Observations  | 167                  | 167                             | 165                                    | 165   | 660  | 165                                       |
| R-squared   | 0.004                | 0.280                           | 0.262                                  | 0.277   | 0.691  | 0.206                                     |
| Controls  | N                    | Y                               | Y                                      | Y   | Y  | Y   |
| Remove outliers   | N                    | N                               | Y                                      | Y   | Y  | Y   |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*indicates statistical significance at 1%, \*\*at 5%, \*at 10%. Controls include district population, literacy, urbanization, gender ratio, fraction of Hindus and Christians, and fraction of population employed in agriculture in 1931, population growth rates between 1931 and 1951 and the fraction of refugees in 1951. Difference-in-difference estimates based on specification (2) in the paper.

**Table 4: Impact of 1935 Reforms on Education Spending***Dep var: Change in per capita spending between pre-1937 (1931-1934) and post-1937 (1937-1940)*

|   | Mean of spending variable<br>over 1931-1934 (rupees) |                     | <u>Controls</u>   | <u>Remove outliers</u> |
|---|--|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|   |  | (1)                 | (2)               | (3)                    |
| <b>Panel A: Change in Total Education Spending per Capita</b> |  |                     |                   |                        |
| Change in % enfranchised                                      | 0.198  | 0.059<br>(0.074)    | 0.116*<br>(0.058) | 0.100*<br>(0.056)      |
| Observations  |  | 93                  | 93                | 92                     |
| R-squared   |  | 0.007               | 0.085             | 0.082                  |
| <b>Panel B: Change in Primary School Spending per Capita</b>  |  |                     |                   |                        |
| Change in % enfranchised                                      | 0.136  | 0.026<br>(0.054)    | 0.103*<br>(0.062) | 0.095<br>(0.075)       |
| Observations  |  | 93                  | 93                | 92                     |
| R-squared   |  | 0.005               | 0.183             | 0.178                  |
| <b>Panel C: Change in Middle School Spending per Capita</b>   |  |                     |                   |                        |
| Change in % enfranchised                                      | 0.038  | -0.075**<br>(0.035) | -0.054<br>(0.043) | -0.048<br>(0.051)      |
| Observations  |  | 93                  | 93                | 92                     |
| R-squared   |  | 0.060               | 0.106             | 0.100                  |
| Controls  |  | N                   | Y                 | Y                      |
| Remove outliers   |  | N                   | N                 | Y                      |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*indicates statistical significance at 1%, \*\*at 5%, \*at 10%. Controls include district population, literacy, urbanization, gender ratio, fraction of Hindus and Christians, and fraction of population employed in agriculture in 1921, and population growth rates between 1921 and 1931.

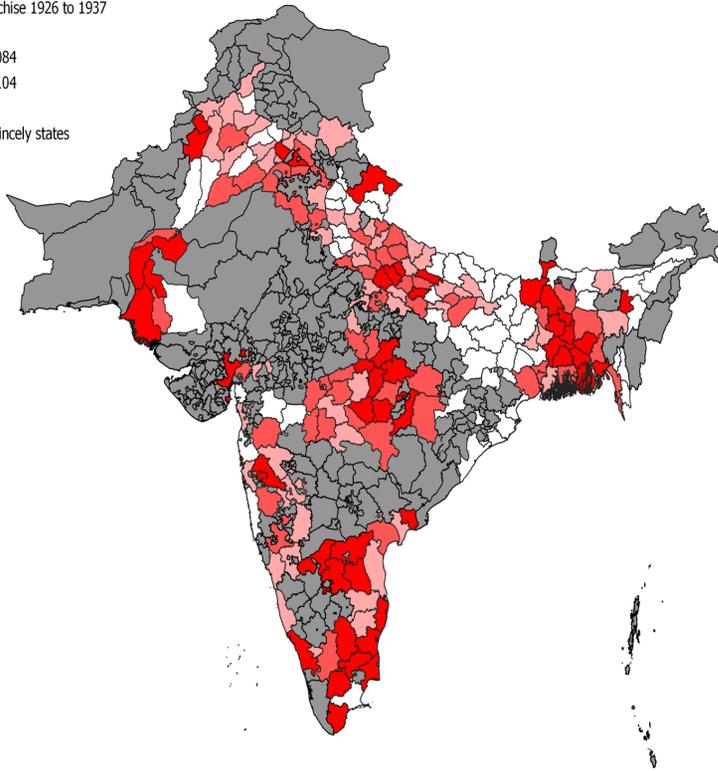
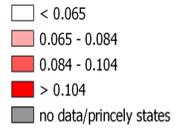
**Table 5: Impact of 1951 Reforms on Access to Primary Schools**

|   | Mean of primary school<br>access in 1951 |                  | <u>Controls</u>   | <u>Remove outliers</u> |
|---|--|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|   |  | (1)              | (2)               | (3)                    |
| <b>Dep var: Change in fraction of villages with access to primary schools between 1951 and 1961</b> |  |                  |                   |                        |
| Change in % enfranchised  | 0.417                                    | 0.716<br>(0.487) | 0.809*<br>(0.409) | 0.720**<br>(0.349)     |
| Observations  |  | 107              | 107               | 102                    |
| R-squared   |  | 0.027            | 0.448             | 0.129                  |
| Controls  |  | N                | Y                 | Y                      |
| Remove outliers   |  | N                | N                 | Y                      |

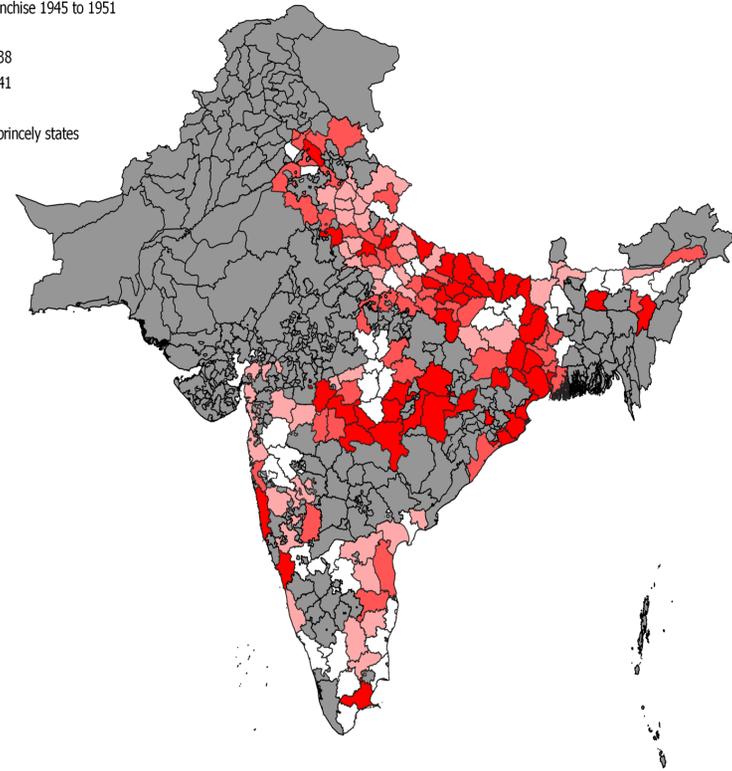
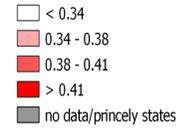
Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*indicates statistical significance at 1%, \*\*at 5%, \*at 10%. Controls include district population, literacy, urbanization, gender ratio, fraction of Hindus and Christians, and fraction of population employed in agriculture in 1931, population growth rates between 1931 and 1951 and the fraction of refugees in 1951.

**Figure 1: Changes in Enfranchisement Caused by the 1935 and 1950 Reforms**

Change in Franchise 1926 to 1937

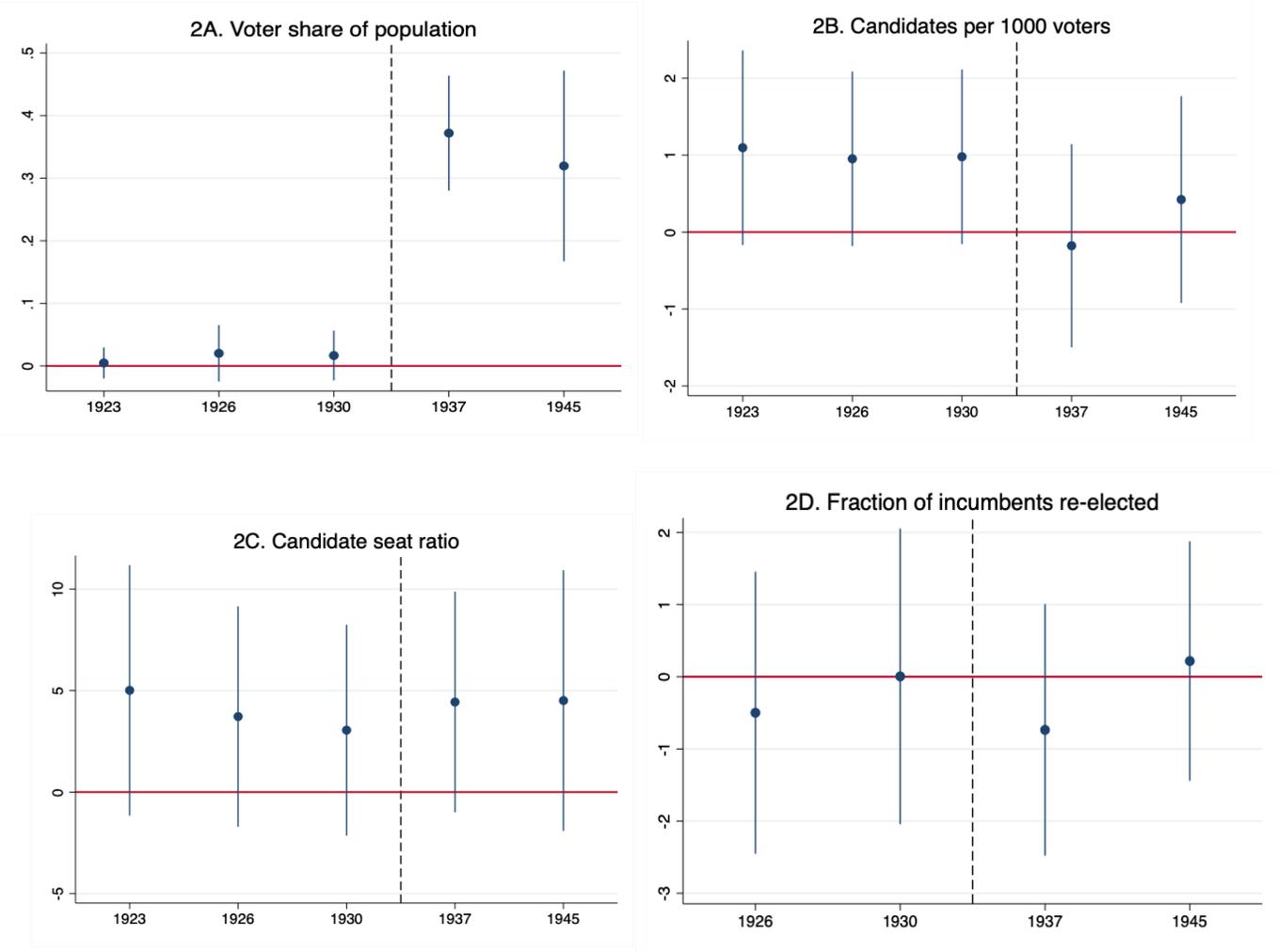


Change in Franchise 1945 to 1951



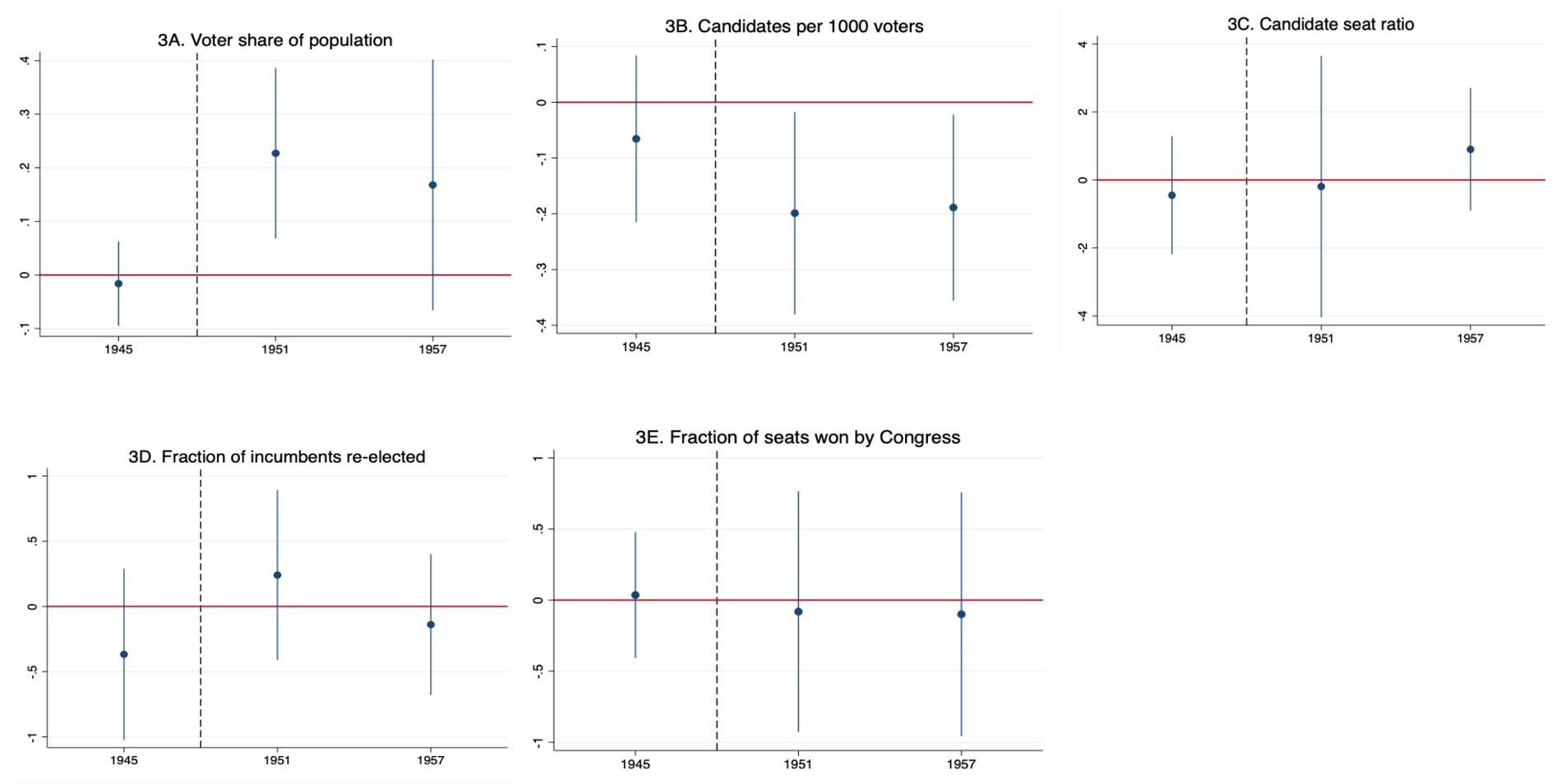
Notes: Enfranchisement is measured as the number of registered voters divided by the population of the district. Maps show the change in this measure due to the reforms of 1935 and 1950.

**Figure 2: Event Study Estimates of 1935 Reform Impact**



Notes: Points denote estimates obtained from the event-study specification in equation (3) in the paper. Vertical lines denote the 95% confidence intervals, based on standard errors clustered at the district level.

**Figure 3: Event Study Estimates of 1950 Reform Impact**



Notes: Points denote estimates obtained from the event-study specification in equation (3) in the paper. Vertical lines denote the 95% confidence intervals, based on standard errors clustered at the district level.