

The Glorious Revolution that Wasn't: Rural Elite Conflict and Demand for Democratization

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Abstract

Social conflict theory holds that democratization is most likely when an incumbent rural elite is challenged by a rising urban bourgeoisie. While this framework accounts for historical patterns of democratization in industrializing autocracies in the Global North, it is less well suited to explaining the emergence of democratic demands in agrarian autocracies in the Global South. In this paper, we examine demands for democratization in the Egyptian parliament before the British occupation in 1882. Using a new dataset of MPs and the universe of parliamentary minutes from 1868 to 1882, we use text analysis, differences-in-differences models, and machine learning to test whether rural intra-elite economic conflicts in MP home districts can lead to meaningful calls for democratization in parliament by rural middle class MPs. Our findings suggest that rural intra-elite competition over labor and land catalyzed demands for oversight (constraints) on the executive and issuance of a new constitution from rural middle class MPs. Although these demands were ultimately suppressed by the British occupation in 1882, this study sheds light on how meaningful demands for democratization emerged in an authoritarian parliament in a non-industrialized agricultural economy that is comparable to other cases in the Global South during the first wave of democratization.

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1 Introduction

Rising elites are thought to play a pivotal role in the transition from autocracy to democracy. An influential thesis in social sciences argues that the probability of democratization increases with inequality, as economically rising, yet politically marginalized, elites demand power-sharing arrangements with the incumbent elite (Lipset 1959, Marx 1885, Moore 1966, Polanyi 1944, Weber 1978). This literature predominantly draws on evidence from industrializing autocracies in modern Europe, where a rising urban bourgeoisie challenged the incumbent landed elite. The conflict between these particular classes is less prevalent in the historical experience of most developing countries, where intra-elite conflict remained primarily agrarian. As a result, 19th and 20th century agrarian autocracies have been largely excluded from theory generation and testing in the study of democratization. This omission is particularly problematic given a long history of rural power-sharing and eventual democratic transition in some modern agrarian autocracies.

In this paper, we explore whether and how intra-elite conflict in agrarian economies influenced demands for executive constraints that could plausibly lead to democratization. We argue that the places powering the industrial revolution with primary products also showed early stages of democratization powered by the effects of rural development.

We test our argument in the case of Khedival Egypt (1805 – 1882), an agrarian, autonomous Ottoman vassal state under the rule of the dynasty of Muhammad Ali Pasha. Under this regime, the rural middle class were incorporated into national political life through the establishment of a consultative parliament. The US Civil War (1861–1865) and subsequent cotton boom increased the economic power of this class, and when parliament was re-opened by the Khedive in the late 1860s, rural middle class MPs began levying explicit demands against the incumbent landed elite and for legislative oversight of the executive.

We document the emergence of rural social conflict using the universe of Egyptian parliamentary minutes from 1869 to 1882, biographical data on MPs, and contemporaneous census and agricultural data. Our main outcome of interest is parliamentary demands for democratization. We measure this using the number and length of MP speeches in the minutes that call for parliamentary oversight of the executive. We exploit a key juncture in Egyptian politics - the 1876 default - with spatial variation in baseline cotton suitability across constituencies. We find that after 1876, rural middle class MPs from cotton-producing districts were more likely to voice pro-democratic demands in parliament than those from less productive districts. These demands were ultimately met by the Khedive in 1882, but short-lived. The British occupied Egypt in response to the passage of the 1882 constitution, stymieing the implementation of pro-democratic reforms.

We therefore find, consistent with work on Europe about the competition between the urban middle class and the landed elite, that the rural agrarian middle class in Egypt pushed for constraints as a result of elite conflict. One implication of this finding is that democratization may well have happened in this context through similar mechanisms as in Europe *if* it had not been upended by British imperialism.

We believe the Egyptian case tells an important story about the potential for democ-

ratization in globalizing agrarian autocracies. The reforms debated by MPs resulted in meaningful constraints on the executive in Egypt show that social conflict within rural elite strata can lead to procedurally democratic outcomes. Another unfortunate and potentially generalizeable observation from the Egyptian case is that the country's early democratic potential was stamped out by foreign occupation and colonial rule. For many primary producing economies in the Global South, colonialism and the attendant reorganization of colonized societies militated against the emergence of democratic equilibria, leaving us to wonder about a counter-factual Egypt would be like had Britain never invaded.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 surveys the literature on intra-elite conflicts and demands for democratization, focusing specifically on role of legislative representation in advancing the demands of rising elites for constraints on the executive. We then advance a theory of agrarian intra-elite conflict over factors of production and why we expect to see political demands follow from economic grievance in Section 3. Section 4 describes the Egyptian case. We then present our novel data sources in Section 5. Section 6 presents the two parts of the empirical analysis. Section 7 concludes.

2 Economic Change and Rural Social Conflict

Economic development is the mainstay of models of social conflict and political order. Theories linking development and social conflict fall in one of two major camps. The first suggests a structural relationship between growth and pro-democratic change. Since Lipset (1959), social scientists have suggested several pathways through which an expanding economy might increase the likelihood of regime change, including increased schooling, urbanization, and the expansion of the middle class (Barro 1996). A second, related literature explains democratization as a function of development-induced social conflict (see, e.g., Moore (1966)). The primary mechanism in these arguments is inequality between social groups, although evidence regarding the direction of this effect is mixed. Premised on the Median Voter Theorem (Meltzer and Richard 1981), Boix (2003) argues that incumbent elites in unequal societies will avoid democratization to protect their wealth due to a fear of progressive redistribution under democracy. Acemoglu and Robinson caveat this relationship by arguing that the demands of the masses factor in to elites' calculus to extend the franchise; they argue that elites may be more willing to extend the franchise when the likelihood of progressive taxation is reduced.

Both theoretical approaches identify industrialization as the driver of social conflict. As industrializing economies transitioned away from agricultural production, the urban bourgeoisie's relative gains in wealth were thought to give rise to more stringent demands for democracy from rising elites. For Boix (2003) in particular, modernization changes elites' options with regard to protecting their wealth. As economies industrialize, Boix argues that capital mobility permits capital flight in the face of high taxation. When more equal societies democratize, governments would be incentivized to curb taxation to avoid the transfer of wealth across borders. This establishes the expectation that in economies with low capital mobility, such as agricultural economies, elites would be unwilling to concede to democratic demands. In general, however, meaning-

ful political competition is more likely to happen between groups on the higher end of the wealth distribution. [Ansell and Samuels \(2014\)](#) observe that the primary threat to rural elites' power is not the median voter, but rather rising classes of economic means. As [Albertus and Menaldo \(2018a\)](#) and [Ziblatt \(2017\)](#) show in the context of 20th century Latin America and 19th and 20th century Europe, conservative elites would prefer to share power by adopting more democratic institutions than risk losing power altogether. In sum, absent industrialization and an urban middle class, existing theories suggest limited prospects for democratic transition.

While industrializing intra-elite competition is the theoretical engine powering this established literature, these dynamics apply to a limited set of cases, namely the United States and Western Europe. Even among studies that disaggregate between elite groups like [Ansell and Samuels \(2014\)](#), scholars focus on the urban middle class as the counterweight to large landowners' monopoly of power. Western European cases, however, are among the least generalizeable for several reasons. First, major players in the global economy, in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa, were heavily reliant on a rapidly expanding import-export trade of agricultural goods, particularly cotton, wheat, and silk. Ultimately, agrarian - not industrial - modernization was the prime mover of economic growth in the majority of countries for much of the 19th century. Second, the first waves of globalization, industrialization, and democratization the 19th century coincided with a shift in the global imperial order. Colonial expansion in agrarian societies undermined the development of democratization processes that stemmed from rural intra-elite conflicts. It is therefore important for our holistic understanding of democratization outside of the Global North to study these dynamics in agrarian societies.

Authoritarian legislatures are the key to understanding the historical process of democratization. Many of the world's longest-lived democracies emerged out of legislative politics under authoritarian rule ([Albertus and Menaldo 2018b](#)). In Europe, incumbent aristocratic elites conceded democratic reforms in authoritarian legislatures in response to the rise of the urban bourgeoisie ([Ziblatt 2017](#)). But democratization from other contexts highlights the importance of showing how rising agrarian elites can challenge incumbents within the legislature. In Latin America, for example, periods of economic boom in export-oriented agriculture sufficiently altered rural class relations that a range of power-sharing arrangements emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries ([Beckert 2015](#), [de Souza Martins 2003](#)). Although this literature has advanced our understanding of how legislatures function in contemporary autocracies, the historical dimensions of autocratic parliaments are less well studied - particularly outside of Europe and Latin America. This article therefore bridges a historical and geographic gap in the study of authoritarian legislatures by examining when and why rising rural elites in Global South autocracies levied demands for democratization in the 19th century.

3 Theory

We posit a general theory of democratization wherein the expansion of the middle class, *regardless of the basis of production*, is likely to result in demands for democratization.

We follow [Ansell and Samuels \(2014\)](#) in defining intra-elite conflict as the competition between incumbent and rising elites. In industrializing cases, the most politically

salient intra-elite conflicts emerged between the rising urban bourgeoisie and the landed class. In agrarian economies, however, intra-elite challenges were more likely to stem from rising *rural* middle classes, particularly in economies dominated by primary agricultural production. Figure 1 shows trends in primary production as a proportion of country exports from 1850 to 1938. The trend line for European primary exports follows a steady downward trajectory, while the exports of the Americas, Africa, MENA, and Asia continue to be dominated by primary products throughout this period. Integration into global export markets fundamentally altered agricultural production. Rising rural elites are more likely to emerge in export-oriented agricultural economies, particularly in those that have been subject to agricultural booms that create opportunities for rising elites to capitalize on rural economic growth.

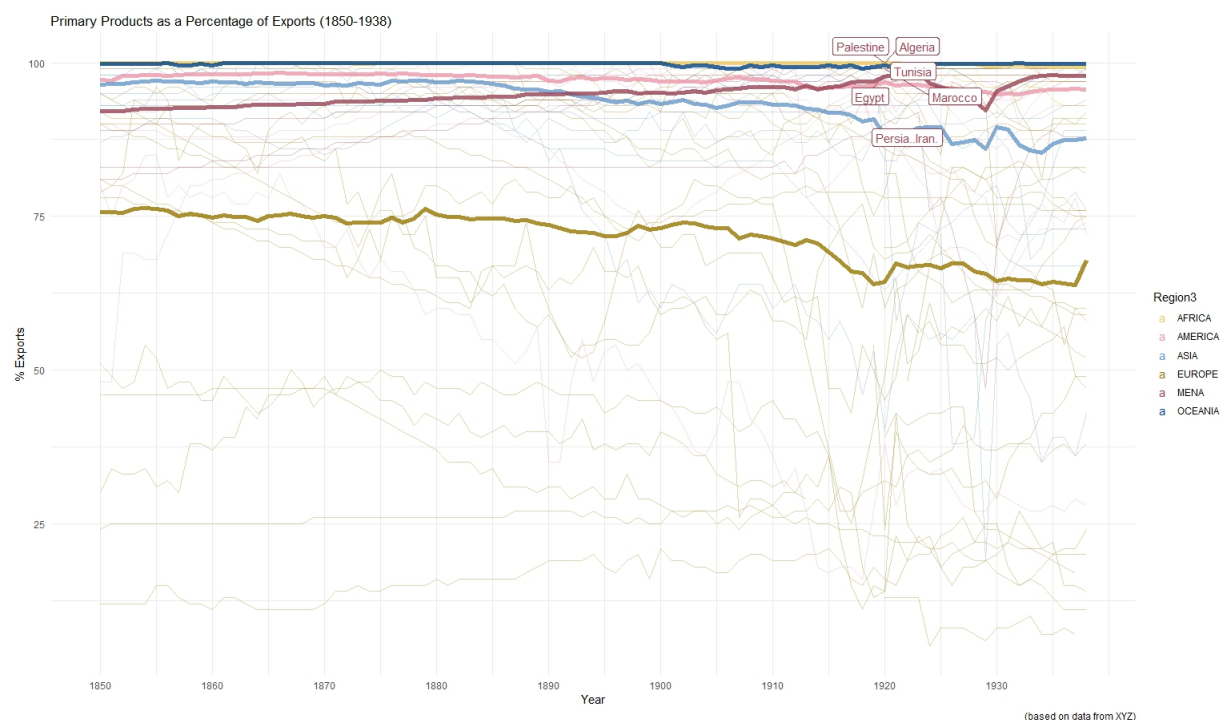


Figure 1: Primary Products as a Proportion of Total Exports, 1850-1938

Source: Federico-Tena World Trade Historical Database

We argue that social conflict within the rural strata can induce the rising elites to issue demands for greater procedural democratization. We define the rising rural middle class as the middle stratum of the agricultural land distribution below the landed elite and the peasantry, or alternatively the richest peasantry. In contrast to the landed elite, the rural middle class does not have access to the state tools of violence (army, police, laws) that enables the former to control local labor. Instead, this class must depend on recruiting free labor for a wage or on purchasing traded coerced labor (slaves). In contrast to the peasantry (who cultivate their own land), the rural middle class have sufficient landholdings to that require them to recruit non-household labor for profit.

Tensions may arise between large landowners and a rising rural middle class for a number of reasons, including competition over land and labor or divergent taxation

preferences. The rural middle class may also have political reasons to represent the interests of the poor over the landed elite. During periods of agrarian change, including commodity booms and a pivot toward export-orientation, we expect that the rising economic power of the rural middle class and the consequent increase in conflict over labor with the landed elite is more likely to bring this class into issuing more demands for political power-sharing with the incumbent landed elite. We expect this conflict to be more salient for the rural middle class in the most agriculturally productive regions, as this is where the competition for factors of production (land and labor) will be most intense.

When rural middle class interests are represented in national legislatures, we expect to see MPs who are both from the rural middle class and from agriculturally productive regions advance political positions that 1) seek to limit landed elite monopolies over factors of production, and 2) pursue pro-democratic reforms that would impose constraints on the executive, who are typically comprised of or allied with landed elites in agrarian settings. In countries with a powerful incumbent landed elite that held the monopoly over the control of labor, the economic changes brought about by agricultural booms prompted rapid changes in rural labor markets that increased friction between the upper and middle rural classes (Beckert 2015). In Brazil, for example, de Souza Martins (2003) argues that it was not land concentration per se that precipitated agrarian conflict, but rather “the transformation in the relations of production that replaced slave labor [...] to ensure the continuity of large-scale commercial agriculture” via changes in the rural labor regime. Indeed, conflicts over free labor underpins much of the early literature on social conflict between rural and urban elites (Moore 1966), so it would stand to reason that massive shifts in agricultural production and boom economies would also create conditions for rural class conflict. The production of sugar and coffee for export also gave rise to the Brazilian rural middle class, and this rural middle class is credited with the expansion of Brazil’s industrial sector and welfare state in the early 20th century; the rural middle class eventually channeled the perceived political cause of the peasantry to advance political goals for the expansion of power-sharing and the reduction in the power of the landed elite (de Souza Martins 2003).

A similar pattern can be observed in Argentina. Increased demand for livestock production also provoked a rural class conflict between a growing rural middle class and large landowners. In the early 19th century, landlords mobilized the bureaucracy and police to assist them in coercing rural labor to increase agricultural profits and depress wages, solidifying their primacy in the agrarian hierarchy (Allub 1973, p. 48). Argentina’s favorable agricultural conditions and land abundance led to a wave of European immigration in the late 1800s, boosted by the demand for export to support textile manufacturing in Europe. By the early 19th century, a frustrated rural petit-bourgeoisie began to organize politically and agitate against unfavorable rent prices, wages, and market prices (Allub 1973); Allub argues that this “passive” revolution led not to the liberation of the peasantry, but rather to a conservative equilibrium with weak institutions and high inequality when the incumbent elites granted political and economic concessions to the rising rural middle class in exchange for stability. These anecdotes from Brazil and Argentina show that rural intra-elite conflict can result in the partial fulfillment of demands for democratization, even if the end result falls short of a fully

institutionalized liberal democracy.

Our argument departs from the literature on class conflict and democratization in two ways. First, unlike Boix (2003) who demonstrates that asset specificity of the kind found in agrarian economies makes elite democratic concessions less likely, we argue that asset specificity does not preclude democratic concessions per se. Our argument is consistent with the recent literature on intra-elite conflict, albeit in a different context. Ansell and Samuels (2014, p. 107) argue that asset specificity increases the likelihood of the urban middle class's revolt against the landowning class due to an increased likelihood of expropriation and regressive taxation under autocracy. Taxation is the explanatory factor that conditions the middle class's incentive to revolt against incumbents under autocracy.

Second, we deviate from the literature's claim that social conflicts have a tendency to arise when there is a tension between sectors - for Albertus and Menaldo, it is the landed elite and everyone else, while for Ansell and Samuels, the middle class is an urban class who may opt to rebel against a landed elite. We argue instead that class conflict may emerge from within a single sector, which is supported by ample evidence. Specifically, economic change within the agricultural sector in predominantly agrarian economies often leads to greater demands from rising rural classes.

4 Context

In the remainder of this paper, we empirically test our theory in the case of Khedival Egypt.¹ Egypt became a world-leading agricultural exporter in the late 19th century following the cotton boom during the US civil war (1861–1865). The US Civil War cotton boom in 1861–1865 induced Egyptian producers to quadruple the cotton production. Egypt became a major exporter of long-staple cotton in the 1820s. Muhammad Ali prioritized the expansion of summer “cash” crops and personally monopolized the export all major cash crops (cotton, wheat, rice, and sugar cane) from 1808 to 1842. The most lucrative crop was long-staple cotton, the cultivation of which expanded rapidly due to infrastructural improvements in the Nile Delta that enabled perennial irrigation. After 1842, cultivators benefited from cotton profits as exporters were able to purchase directly from growers.

This economic shock enriched not only the landed elite, but also led to the economic empowerment of the village headman and the wealthy peasantry who would become a new rural middle class. The boom-induced cotton expansion in 1861–1865 increased the demand for labor among both classes due to the labor intensity of cotton. Furthermore, because local labor was scarce relative to land, the increased labor demand translated into higher coercion of labor by both classes. However, there was heterogeneity across the two classes with respect to the type of (coerced) labor employed. The landed elite held the state monopoly of the coercion of the local peasantry. The rural middle class had two options, either to purchase imported slaves on the market or

¹Egypt was an autonomous Ottoman vassal state from 1824 to 1882, a *de facto* British colony under nominal Ottoman sovereignty from 1882 to 1914, and a British protectorate from 1914 to 1922, when it gained its nominal independence in February 1922. Throughout the whole period, it was ruled by the dynasty of the Ottoman viceroy Muhammad Ali (1805–1848). Egypt's viceroys adopted the Khedive title between 1867 and 1914.

recruit landless farmers (outside large estates) for wages. [Saleh \(2021\)](#) shows that the cotton boom caused the emergence of (imported) agricultural slavery in cotton areas.²

The rural middle class dominated the Egyptian legislature during this period (1824–1882). Viceroy Muhammad Ali Pasha created the first Egyptian legislature (1824–1837) as a consultative assembly for rural notables, mainly village headmen. [Sayyid-Marsot \(1984\)](#) argues that this body was created with the primary goal of supporting Muhammad Ali’s rural reform programs.³ The viceroy needed local buy-in to accomplish highly coercive reforms, including military and corvée conscription, export-oriented agriculture, and tax collection, sensibly believing that the support of local notables was key to their success. After the dissolution of the first legislature in 1837, parliamentary life Khedive Ismail revived the body in 1866. The Law of 22 October 1866 governed the parliament over four cycles: 1866–1868, 1870–1873, 1876–1879, and 1881–1882 ([Subhi 1947](#), Vol. 5, pp. 83–86). Like its predecessor, this law restricted suffrage to the local elites of each constituency, and winning candidates were required to pay a 500 piastre land tax ([Ezzelarab 2009](#), [Weipert-Fenner 2020](#)). Members of the 1866–1882 parliaments (called the *Majlis shura al-nuwwab* from 1866–1879 and *Majlis al-nuwwab al-misry* from 1881–1882), were by and large village headman, some of whom had become men of means during the cotton boom. Landed elite interests were well-represented in the Royal Diwan (Court) and in high-ranking ministerial and bureaucratic posts. In other words, decision-making remained securely in the hands of the landed elite while the rural middle class-dominated legislature remained consultative until 1882.

[Weipert-Fenner \(2020\)](#) considers several domestic and international reasons for the Egyptian regime’s resumption of parliamentary life in 1866. Domestically, the legislature could serve to increase the buy-in of an increasingly wealthy rural middle class and consolidate the Khedive’s power among elites and in the countryside. Internationally, the Khedive was under heavy pressure from foreign powers who had financed loans for Egypt’s infrastructural development - most notably the Suez Canal. With the rural middle class co-opted, the parliament might have been expected to legitimate tax increases needed to service mounting foreign debts.

Ultimately, the Egyptian parliament was not a quiescent political institution. Figure 2 depicts the timeline of major parliamentary events from 1866 to 1882. After Egypt defaulted on its foreign debt in 1876, Britain and France assigned two foreign ministers to the Egyptian cabinet. In the political and economic fallout from the default, MPs began to take steps to formalize their demands for democratization. The series of constitutional reforms from 1866 to 1882 are presented in Table 1. MPs drafted a new constitution in 1879 that would have institutionalized legislative oversight as a norm. Compared to the 1866 law, the 1879 constitution would have broadened both elec-

²The demand for slaves came from village headmen and the wealthiest peasants; the rural middle class (Appendix Table 5, column 1). Hence, the cotton boom served to increase the wealth and status of this class. In contrast, the landed elite did not respond to the boom by purchasing more slaves, but they rather resorted to coercing more peasants using their state coercive power (columns 2-3). They did so via recruiting more army and police soldiers on large estates presumably to subdue the peasantry (column 4), and expanding on *jifliks*, large estates that were formed on confiscated tax-paying usufruct land.

³The 1824–1837 parliament included 99 village headmen, 24 district governors, 4 ulama, and 33 appointees chosen by the viceroy ([Weipert-Fenner 2020](#)).

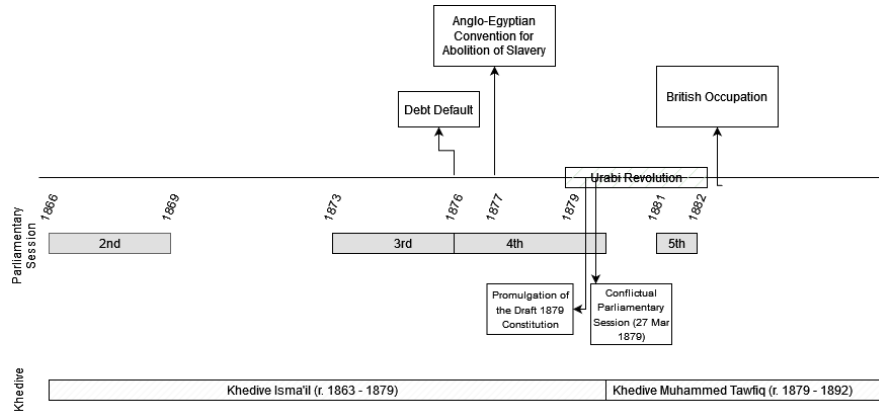


Figure 2: Political and Legislative Event Timeline (1866-1882)

torate and candidate eligibility beyond the rural middle class. This constitution was never passed into law, as the parliament was shuttered in response to mounting opposition to Khedive from MPs and the broad-based revolutionary movement led by Colonel Ahmed 'Urabi, himself the son of a village headman. When parliament was re-opened by popular demand in 1881, the new Khedive, Tewfiq, succumbed to parliamentary and popular pressure to sign the 1882 constitution (modeled closely on the 1879 draft) into law. Compared to the 1866 law, a broader swath of society were permitted to vote in or stand for elections. Anyone who was eligible to vote was also eligible to put forward their candidacy for a parliamentary seat in a body that would now - by law - have oversight of the executive. In the end, these changes were never implemented. Britain invaded soon after the publication of the 1882 constitution, which was repealed by the colonial administration after putting down the 'Urabi revolt.

Egypt's long history of legislative institutions during a critical moment of economic change provide an opportunity to observe demands for democratization within the Egyptian parliament. In the analysis that follows, we pair a data set on MP characteristics with MP speeches from 1868 to 1882 to test our hypotheses about the emergence of rural intra-elite social conflict and demands for democratization.

5 Data

Our empirical analysis is based on novel data on Egyptian members of parliament (MPs) and MP speeches that we constructed from both primary (archival) and secondary (published) historical sources in Arabic. We combine these data sources with a measure of cotton production in 1877. In the next draft, we plan to integrate census data to more precisely capture the rural intra-elite conflict over labor and land at the district level.

Demands for Democratization in Parliament (1868–1882) To observe the substance and frequency of MP demands in the Egyptian legislature, We digitized and hand-coded the parliamentary minutes from 1868 to 1882. The National Archives of Egypt, [Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiya \(2017\)](#), published the minutes in a set of four volumes. The minutes from the first session of the 1866–1869 parliament in 1866-1867 are missing from the parliamentary archives, so our data begins with the first available session in 1868.

Table 1: Electoral Laws in Egypt, 1866 to 1882

	1866	1879	1882
Legislative Oversight	No	Yes	Yes
Electorate Eligibility			
– Election Method	In rural provinces, a secret ballot by sheikhs. In urban provinces, consensus among urban notables.		Electorate elects the electors (who must be at least 25 years old and are among the electorate of the district).
– Minimum Age		21	21
– Literacy	After the 11th election, must be able to read and write		
– Residence		Egyptian citizen, or resident for at least five years.	Resident in the district for 10 years.
– Tax			Pays all taxes owed equal to 500 piastres per year
– Other	Must be among those with property, cannot be bankrupt, or a former convict.		1) Ulama 2) Priests and other Christian spiritual leaders 3) Jewish rabbis 4) Teachers, civil officials, secondary school graduates 5) Royal office holders, whether they are employed or retired 6) Military officers, whether active duty, reserved, or retired 7) Registered advocates 8) Doctors and engineers Barred: foreigners. Those who lack civil or political rights (i.e., imprisoned, exiled, hard labor sentence, conviction of a felony, treason, theft, fraud, graft, or religious infractions, or officially barred from public service by the state. Convicted violators of the election law. Debtors. Owners of or workers in gambling establishments or brothels.
Candidate Eligibility			
– Minimum Age	25	30	25
– Literacy	After the 7th election, must be able to read and write		Read and write proficiently
– Residence	In rural districts, local headmen are the candidates. Cannot be military, bureaucracy, employed by a foreign entity, or a current mayor or headman.		Same as electorate
– Tax			Same as electorate
– Other	Described as sane and known to the government as an Egyptian citizen.	Egyptian citizen, possessing full political and civil rights and who is registered in the electoral list.	Same as electorate
– Barred If	Bankrupt, "needy poor", taken up position only one year prior, convicts	Central government employee, except for mayors, police, members of diwans and their deputies, as long as it does not exceed one fifth of the body membership.	Same as electorate

The remaining records are complete for all parliamentary cycles in the study period. We classified each segment of the text according to the following typology. “General statements” are narrative accounts of the date, time, and circumstances of meetings. Any instance of an MP speaking during a parliamentary session was classified as “MP Debate.” “Reports” to the parliament were written statements submitted by MPs or MP committees for the body’s consideration on substantive issues, while “petitions” were written requests for action on the part of MPs or constituents. “Minister statements” include statements delivered in person or in writing from a member of the ministerial cabinet to the parliament. “Opinions or Decisions” denote any instance the parliament decides a matter as a body. All text observations include labels for the session, date, and meeting number, as well as any MP(s) or individuals responsible for that statement.

In this analysis, we restrict our sample to MP speeches (“MP Debate”), for a total of 1,248 MP speeches across four parliamentary cycles. Attendance in parliamentary sessions was mandatory, and rare absences were formally excused recorded in the minutes. This feature of parliamentary procedure increases our confidence that this measure captures the extent to which each MP participated actively in open debates.

In the original text, MP debates are entered into the record under the substantive issue up for debate. For each speech, we included the original issue label. We then created a more detailed description of each issue. During this process, we were able to correct errors from the source issue label that did not account for MPs switching topic or digressing, and thus created a more accurate set of issue labels for each speech. The culmination of this process was a set of labels that we classified into eight general topics

of discussion: 1) parliamentary organization⁴, 2) agriculture and irrigation⁵, 3) land (including land tax)⁶, 4) labor⁷, 5) budget and finances⁸, 6) civil public services (judiciary, bureaucracy, education)⁹, 7) cabinet-parliament relationship¹⁰, and 8) all other topics. Demands for democratization are measured by the incidence, number, and word count of speeches that fall under general topic 7, “cabinet-parliament relationship.” We detail our coding procedure and topic classification in Appendix 8.2. All issues that fell under this topic called for parliamentary oversight and constraints on the executive. Figure 3 shows the frequency of topics by parliament.

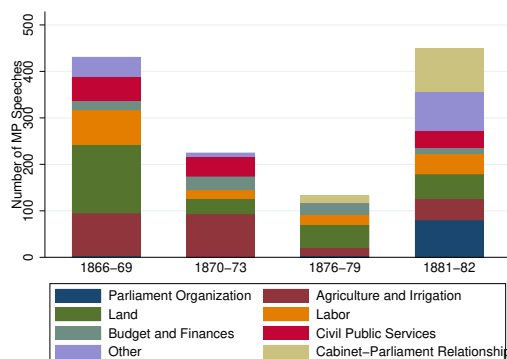


Figure 3: MP Speech Counts by Parliament and Topic

Because our theory argues that social conflict between the rural middle class and landed elite is driving the increase in demand for democratization, we create fine-grained classification for substantive topics that could be reasonably considered conflictual, namely land, labor, budget and finances, and civil public services. Land issues were disaggregated into private property rights on land, land tax, and other. Labor issues were divided into “state coercion of labor” versus all other land-related issues. Budget and finances was broken down into government budget (including the default) and all other financial matters. Finally, we classified speeches on civil public services into those about decentralization versus all other matters in this category.

The final step in our classification exercise was to code attitude labels for each speech on a conflictual general topic. Such speeches were labeled as pro-status quo, reformist, or procedural relative to the status quo of the issue up for debate. Based on

⁴Parliament management, opening and closure of sessions, committee and internal parliamentary elections, and MP affairs.

⁵Technical, apolitical discussions about crops, blights, and infrastructure.

⁶This category includes debates about land ownership, large estates, cadastral surveys, and land taxes.

⁷This category includes debates about the corvée, census-taking and enumeration of workers, peasant labor on large estates, and policies, laws, or taxes directed toward labor, such as conscription.

⁸This category includes national-level debates about the government budget, foreign debt settlement, and non-land taxes.

⁹This category includes discussions of local and central organs of state, including agricultural councils, dispute resolution councils, courts, and the relationship of village headmen to their localities and the central state.

¹⁰This category includes debates about laws governing the relationship between parliament and the regime (Khedive and ministers), as well as election laws and a new draft constitution.

these labels, we construct a categorical variable where a pro-status quo speech equals negative one, procedural statements equal zero, and a reformist speech equals one.

We validated the consistency of our MP attitude coding by calculating inter-coder reliability scores. We validate two measures. The first is a binary variable that equals one if the coder identified a given issue as politically contentious. The second is our categorical attitudes measure. For a random subset of 100 MP speeches, a coder independently codes both the binary and categorical variables. We then compare the original coding to the validation sample to calculate Cohen's Kappa, a measure of inter-coder agreement. A score of zero indicates no agreement, while 1 implies perfect agreement. Interpretations vary across disciplines, but a Cohen's Kappa of 0.81 and greater is the conventional threshold for "near perfect" agreement. The Cohen's Kappa scores for our binary contentious issue variable equals 0.84, and for the categorical variable 0.81. This metric suggests that our human coding of MP speech attitudes is consistent.

As an additional validation exercise, we used supervised machine learning models to predict whether or not an MP speech was contentious or not using our binary variable. In the human-coded dataset, 860 speeches are labeled as contentious (1), while 388 are labeled as uncontentious (0). We split the data into a training set ($n = 988$) and a test set ($n = 250$). After fitting the model on the training set, we calculated the average accuracy score using a variety of basic machine learning models. The following list includes the model type and the associated accuracy scores in parentheses: logistic regression (0.860), random forest (0.848), naive Bayes classifier (0.844), and linear support vector machine (0.856). The high average accuracy across models gives further reason for confidence in the consistent coding of our attitude variable.

Using these data, we analyze the substance and intensity of MP demands in several ways. First, we use MP speaking counts to capture an individual's participation in parliament and to proxy for their relative level of involvement in parliamentary life. We also measure the word count length of contributions to measure the volume of their contribution - an MP who participates frequently and speaks for a longer duration is more likely to influence parliamentary debate. Second, we use our topic classifications to assess which subjects were more frequently raised or discussed by rural middle class MP in low or high cotton districts. Finally, we do a close reading of the minutes to provide a discursive evidence of social conflict and demands for democratization from the rural middle class.

Political Representation in Parliament We constructed a dataset at the MP, chamber, and parliamentary cycle level, that spans the universe of members of the Egyptian parliament starting with the first parliament under Muhammad Ali in 1824–1837 until the 2015–2020 parliament. To do so, we rely on a secondary source in Arabic, *History of Parliamentary Life in Egypt since the Era of Muhammad Ali Pasha* compiled by Subhi (1947) from the primary lists of MPs at the Egyptian parliamentary archives.¹¹ In this article, we restrict the analysis to the period from 1866 to 1882. This includes four parliamentary cycles with a unicameral consultative legislature.¹²

This database has a wide range of variables including dates of parliamentary cycle,

¹¹Subhi was the director of the House of Representatives' administration in 1939–1947, and thus had access to the primary lists of MPs.

¹²The dates of the cycles are: 1866–1869, 1870–1873, 1876–1879, and 1881–1882.

official name of chamber, full name of MP, occupation (e.g., village headman), honorific title (e.g., pasha, bey, effendi, sheikh), whether the MP is elected or appointed, date of MP's entry into the parliament, constituency at the province, district, or village level, the executive position that the MP held in parliament if any (e.g., president of parliament), whether the MP completed his mandate or not, and the reason for not completing the mandate (e.g., death, illness, resignation, promotion to governmental position, assassination, election results nullification).

We manually matched MPs across chambers and cycles, and created a unique identifier for each MP, using the information on MP's name.¹³ We localize MPs according to the 1882 census administrative divisions. We also assign the occupation and honorific title of the MP during his first parliamentary mandate to the subsequent mandates, in order to ensure consistency of the MP's occupation and title across chambers and cycles.

Figure (4a) shows the evolution of the class composition of MPs from 1824 to 1923 (Author note: this period is an artifact of the previous version of the paper and will be adjusted in the final version). During the 1866 to 1882 parliaments, we can see that the rural middle class dominated parliament. Appendix Figures 15, 16, and 17 show that MPs during this period were mostly village headmen (*sheikh al-balad*) and rural notables (*a'yan*), mostly with the sheikh or effendi title, and predominantly rural. After British occupation in 1882, we observe a shift from the rural middle class towards the landed elite who hold the majority of seats by the 1913-1923 parliament (See Hartnett and Saleh 2023). An alternative visualization of this shift is shown in Figure (4b) by plotting the regression predicted proportions of the rural middle class, landed elite, and urban middle class by parliamentary cycle.

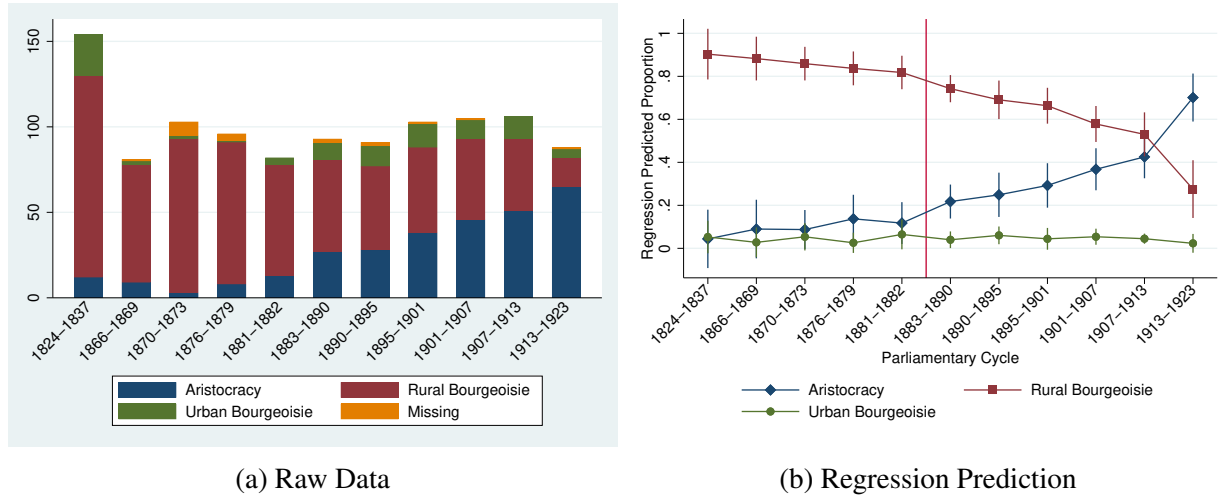


Figure 4: The Social Class Composition of Members of Parliament, 1824-1923
Notes: We combine MPs in the two chambers during the bicameral period from 1883 to 1913. The regression predicted proportions are based on estimating the following regression among MPs with non-missing social class: $y_{mvc} = \alpha_v + \beta_c + \varepsilon_{mvc}$, where y is the social class indicator of MP m in village v in cycle c . Standard errors are clustered at the village level.

¹³In Egypt, one's name consists of the first name followed by the father's first name (second name), the paternal grandfather's first name (third name), and so on.

5.0.1 Regressors

Crop Suitability We measure the geographic variation in cotton suitability on the eve of the British occupation at the district level by the cotton yield per *feddan* in 1877 that we constructed from [Ministère de l'Intérieur \(1877\)](#). To control for cereals and beans suitability, we collected data on the area and yield of wheat, barley, and beans in 1877 from the same source.¹⁴ We then merged both the cotton and cereals productivity measures with the MPs dataset at the district level.¹⁵ Figure 19 shows the spatial distribution of cotton and cereals suitability. Lower Egypt (Delta) was on average more productive in all crops than Upper Egypt, but there is significant variation in productivity within each region.

As a robustness check, we employ the FAO-GAEZ cotton suitability index. Because Egyptian agriculture is irrigation-fed, we use the cotton suitability index under irrigation and intermediate input level for the baseline period (1961–1990).¹⁶ The cotton suitability index is continuous varying between 0 and 1, with 1 being the highest value in the sample, and 0 the lowest.

In the following section, we leverage these novel data sources to test whether rural middle class MPs from high cotton districts were more likely to 1) engage in debates on contentious issues related to social conflict, and 2) advocate for pro-democratic reforms that constrained the executive - a critical component of democratization.

¹⁴Cereals and beans were the main competing crops to cotton occupying 74% of cultivated area.

¹⁵For MPs who are localized at the (higher) province level, we assigned to them the cross-district average cotton and cereals productivity within their province.

¹⁶The crop suitability indices under irrigation are not available at the low input level, presumably because the irrigation infrastructure requires a sufficiently high level of input. We use FAO-GAEZ Data Portal Version 3.0.1. The crop suitability indices under irrigation assume that water resources are available and that the irrigation infrastructure is in place. They take into account the type of soil and the terrain slope. The crop suitability indices under rain-fed agriculture show no variation within Egypt, which receives too little rainfall.

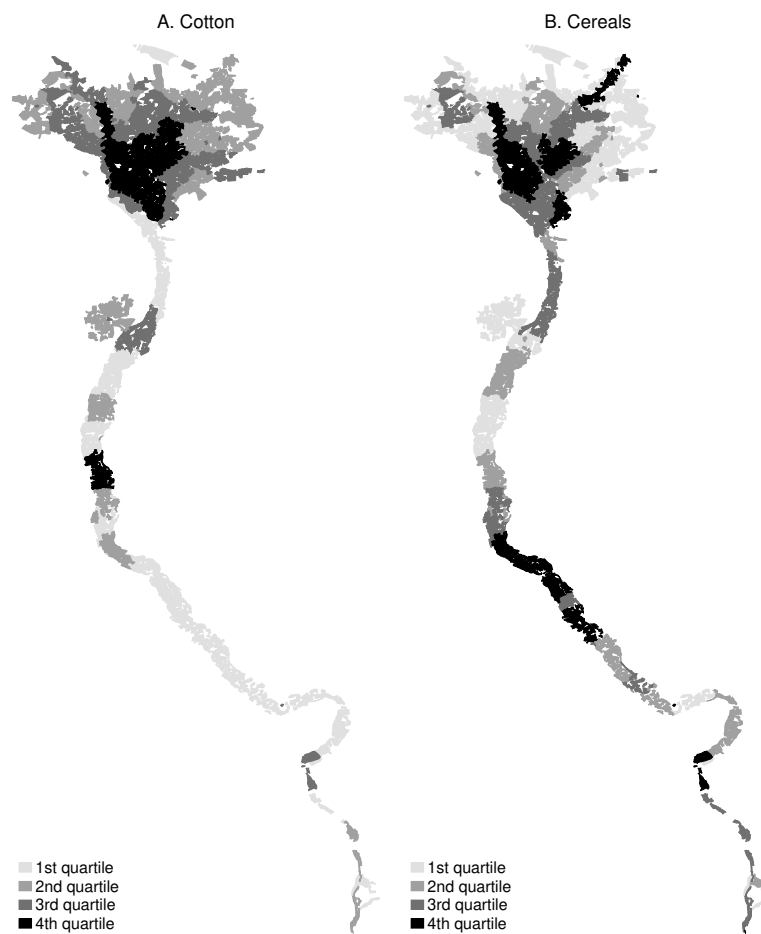


Figure 5: Cotton and Cereals Yield Per Feddan in 1877

Notes: The maps show the spatial distribution at the district level of the cotton and cereals yield per *feddan* in 1877. We use the 1882 census administrative division.

Source: [Ministère de l'Intérieur \(1877\)](#).

6 Empirical Analysis

In our analysis, we examine the relationship between speeches by rural middle class MPs and cotton production in their home district. Our theory predicts that rural middle class MPs from highly productive cotton districts are more likely to come into conflict with landed elites over scarce factors of production - namely land and labor. We begin by examining the correlation between cotton production and general MP speech topics. We then use a differences-in-differences analysis to test the spatial and temporal variation in pro-reform MP speeches about conflictual topics (land, labor, and democratization).

6.1 Effect of Cotton Production on MP Speech Topics

We begin our analysis of MP speeches using a bag-of-words approach. We pre-processed the Arabic text to normalize orthography and remove diacritics and punctuation using the CaMeL Tools library in Python. We then generated a list of stopwords, or words that do not contribute semantically to the analysis, using an internet library of Arabic stopwords and a supplemental list that we generated for this corpus based on the cleaning process and knowledge of the context. We display word frequencies by parliamentary session using word clouds (Figures 6 – 9). Larger text indicates more frequent usage.



Figure 6: Word Cloud, MP Speeches (1866–1869 Cycle)

Notes: Top 10 Words: Landed estates, agriculture, parliament, pasture, decontamination, countryside, people, director, department/division, side. Limited to top 70 words for legibility.

In the 1866–1869 cycle (Figure 6), the speeches tended to focus on the technocratic aspects of agriculture. Landed estates were among the most frequently used words, but usually in the context of agricultural development and irrigation. This stands in contrast to the 1870–1873 cycle (Figure 7), where we begin to observe more discussion around labor issues - particularly as they related to coercive practices of *corvée* labor and labor on landed estates.

The most frequent terms used in the later parliaments make more explicit reference to governance and administration as they related to contentious issues like labor and



Notes: Top 10 Words: Landed estates, parliament, water, labor, agriculture, corvée labor, directors, work, side, government. Limited to top 70 words for legibility.

legislative oversight. In the 1876–1879 cycle, we see frequent mentions of ministries, ministers, and public works, alongside more explicit discussion of the “countryside”, landed estates, and the *corvée* (Figure 8). This parliament was closed by the Khedive for being too confrontational. In the final parliamentary cycle before British occupation (Figure 9), the business of parliament appears to have radically shifted to focus almost exclusively on legislative issues. Unlike previous parliaments, land and labor issues take a back seat to debates about election laws, a new constitution, and defining the relationship between the legislature and the executive.



Notes: Top 10 Words: Parliament, landed estates, countryside, ministry, issue, interior, corvée labor, public works, meeting, side. Limited to top 70 words for legibility.

Building on our first-cut analysis of word frequencies, we use OLS regression to examine the relationship between the cotton suitability of an MP’s home district on speech length for each general topic. We limit our sample to “MP Debate” speeches by rural middle class MPs from 1866 to 1882. Table 2 presents the results. Not only are



Figure 9: Word Cloud, MP Speeches (1881–1882 Cycle)

Notes: Top 10 Words: Parliament, decree, committee, ministry, issue, law, Constitution, report, government, election. Limited to top 70 words for legibility.

high cotton MP speeches longer than speeches by low cotton MPs (column 1), they also speak at greater length on matters of land, labor, parliament organization, and cabinet-parliament relations when the MP comes from a high cotton district. The effect of high cotton suitability is positive and statistically significant for speeches related to land (column 4) and labor (column 5) issues, lending support to our hypothesis that scarce factors of production in agriculturally productive regions should lead to higher levels of intra-elite conflict. High cotton rural middle class MPs are also more likely to make longer interventions on technical aspects of agriculture and irrigation (column 3).

Table 2: Speeches of the Rural Middle Class in Parliament by Cotton Suitability

	Length of Speeches Broken Down by Topic								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Total	Parliament Organization	Agriculture & Irrigation	Land	Labor	Budget & Finances	Judiciary & Bureaucracy	Cabinet- Parliament Relationship	Other
=1 if Cotton High	86.08** (39.77)	10.39* (6.05)	31.55* (16.23)	29.67* (15.30)	20.48** (8.13)	1.19 (7.35)	6.95 (7.84)	11.45** (5.05)	5.61 (3.89)
Parliamentary Cycle FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters (Districts)	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Obs (MP-Cycle)	307	307	307	307	307	307	307	307	307
R ²	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.04
Av. Dep. Var. 1866–1869	196.01	6.97	54.04	50.04	30.59	9.88	32.67	0.00	11.81

Notes: Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses. The regressions are at the MP and parliamentary cycle level from 1866 to 1882. There are four parliamentary cycles: 1866–1869, 1870–1873, 1876–1879, 1881–1882. The sample is restricted to the rural middle class MPs. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

The positive and statistically significant effect of being from a high cotton area on power-sharing MP speeches (parliamentary organization (column 2), cabinet-parliament relationship (column 8)) also provide evidence that local conflict over agricultural factors of production spurs greater intra-elite conflict. High cotton status does not predict speech length on topics unrelated to social conflict and power-sharing, namely budget

and finances (column 6), judiciary and bureaucracy (column 7), or miscellaneous matters (column 8). The results are the same if we operationalize MP speeches as number of speeches (not shown).

This initial set of results speaks to two trends in MP speeches. First, the word frequencies in the word cloud plots demonstrate a qualitative shift over parliamentary cycles away from a focus on agricultural management to matters of democratic reform. Second, our OLS regression results show that being a rural middle class MP from a high cotton district correlates to longer speeches in general, and on matters related to social conflict and democratization, namely land, labor, and the cabinet-parliament relationship. In the next analysis, we focus explicitly on these conflictual topics to assess whether high cotton MPs were more supportive of reform in these domains than rural middle class MPs from low cotton areas.

6.2 Social Conflict and Demands for Democratization in Parliament

In the previous section, we established a correlation between cotton productivity in an MP's home district and the length of speeches on matters related to intra-elite conflict and democratization. In this analysis, we examine the effect of the Egyptian regime's default on their debt in 1876 on MP speeches supporting pro-democratic reforms that would have strengthened parliamentary oversight of the executive. The 1876 default signalled a critical threat to Egyptian sovereignty and a sea-change in national politics. Egyptian debt exceeded 68 million pounds, and the British and French created a Public Debt Administration that brought all decisions related to public finances under their control. Austerity followed, contributing to popular and parliamentary resistance against the Khedival regime. We provide evidence that high cotton regions were also more likely to advocate for labor reforms after the 1876 default, suggesting that labor was a more contested factor of production than land in the Egyptian case.

We formally investigate the effect of the 1876 default on MP speeches using difference-in-differences (DID) strategy to exploit the variation in baseline cotton suitability across constituencies. Our model is estimated at the MP and parliamentary session level from 1866 to 1882:

$$y_{mdc} = \beta_1 cotton_d \times post1876_c + \alpha_d + \gamma_c + X_{dc}\theta + \varepsilon_{mdc} \quad (1)$$

where y_{mdc} is the outcome of MP m located in district d in cycle c , $cotton_d$ is the cotton yield per *feddan* in district d in 1877, $post1876_c$ is a dummy variable indicating whether cycle c is after the 1876 default, α_d is a full set of district fixed effects that capture the cross-district baseline heterogeneity in parliamentary outcomes, and γ_c is a full set cycle fixed effects that capture aggregate shocks to parliamentary outcomes that may have affected all districts (e.g., issuance of a new election law). The vector X_{dc} includes the interaction of the post-1876 dummy variable with each of the following as control variables: wheat yield, wheat area, beans yield, beans area, barley yield, barley area. All controls were taken from the 1877 production data. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

6.2.1 Findings: Demands for Democratization

The validity of the DID specification in equation (1) rests upon the parallel trends assumption: Higher cotton suitability districts would have witnessed a similar trend of pro-democratic speeches to that of lower cotton suitability districts prior to the 1876 default. We provide evidence in support of this assumption by examining the pre-1876 trends in MP speeches by cotton suitability in Figure 10.

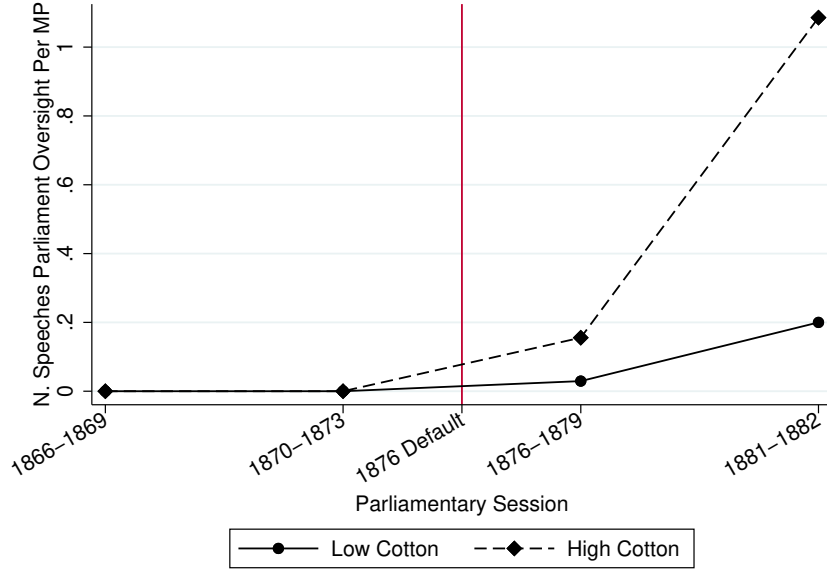


Figure 10: N Speeches on Parliamentary Oversight Per MP

Table 3 shows that high cotton MPs are more likely to give a speech about democratization (columns 1 – 4), whether measured as a binary variable (=1 if a pro-democratic reform speech is given in the cycle) or by the number of speeches. The speeches on this topic also tended to be longer by about 12 to 15 words than those given by MPs from low cotton districts.

Parliamentary minutes do not explicitly reference pro-democratic reform to the cabinet-parliament relationship until 1879. The Speaker of the Parliament gave a general statement attesting to insufficient documentation being provided by the Ministries of Finance and Interior. He then issued a direct call for more MP collaboration (and room for dissent) in interactions with the Council of Ministers: “There needs to be a discussion between the Councils on matters concerning Finance, a greater exchange of information, and more debates with the elected members. This should occur as soon as possible.” In some cases, such as in a bill related to charitable property, the Ministry of Waqf explicitly incorporated input from MP debates into the final version of the law.

Demands for democratization also manifested in the process of drafting a new constitution in 1879. MPs debated the details of a draft constitution that would reform parliamentary elections and the relative authority of the parliament vis á vis the ministerial cabinet. The new constitution would have expanded the membership of the parliament to 120 members and made ministers accountable to the parliament. Rhetorically, the

Table 3: Cotton Suitability, Egypt's 1876 Default, and Parliamentary Demand for Democratization

	=1 if MP Gave Speech		Number of Speeches		Length of Speeches	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cotton \times Post-1876	0.09 (0.06)	0.13* (0.07)	0.50* (0.28)	0.59* (0.30)	12.81* (7.20)	15.44* (7.89)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Session FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters (Districts)	57	57	57	57	57	57
Obs (MP-Session)	292	292	292	292	292	292
R^2	0.30	0.32	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.27
Av. Dep. Var. 1866–1869	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Notes: The sample is at the MP and parliamentary session level. It is restricted to rural middle class MPs localized at the district or village levels. Controls include the interaction of the post-1876 dummy variable with each of wheat yield, wheat area, beans yield, beans area, barley yield, barley area, measured in 1877. Standard errors clustered at the district level are in parentheses. The regressions include the parliamentary cycles from 1866 to 1882: 1866–1869, 1870–1873, 1876–1879, and 1881–1882. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

early debates feature MPs thanking the Khedive and his ministers for taking seriously the will of the “nation and its people,” with the implication being that MPs enjoyed a popular mandate. The MPs planned to constitute a commission to study and prepare the document for Khedival approval and circulation when the parliament was unilaterally shuttered by the regime.

This shuttering followed a major stand-off between the Minister of the Interior and MPs who protested the cabinet and Khedive’s right to terminate a session of parliament. In March 1879, the parliament issued a statement that the body would audit all finances collected and spent on land and agricultural maintenance. During the same session, the Minister of Interior declared that the parliamentary session is dissolved. This declaration sparks an impassioned debate about the parliament’s mandate. Mohammed Effendi Radhi (a high-cotton rural middle class MP) objects to the Minister of Interior, saying “[...] the council can only be dismissed if it considers the issues on which it has written and in the budget.” The Minister of Interior argues that all the issues on the table are long-term issues, and that the term of the council is concluded. The Chamber notes that foreign journalists accompanied the Minister, which several MPs label as censorship and an opportunity to portray the Egyptian people as vulgar.

Parliament re-opened in 1881 in a tense political climate. Concerned that Khedive Ismail was bending to popular pressure, Britain and France arranged for him to be deposed in 1879. His son, Tewfiq, succeeded him. A nationalist movement, led by Colonel Ahmed 'Urabi, roiled against the increasing influence of Britain and France on Khedive and his ministers, who were primarily drawn from the landowning Turkish elite. The minutes show that rural middle class MPs began to demand constitutional recognition of the body’s taxation and budgetary oversight.¹⁷ The minutes show that MPs were gaining more control over the parliamentary process and were within sight of an political settlement with the Egyptian government that would have granted the parliament oversight over the executive. The minutes from the 1881–1882 session primarily discuss the drafting of the 1882 constitution, which was ultimately passed (see Table 1). The

¹⁷See Weipert-Fenner (2020) for further analysis.

fear that the formal constraints legislated in the 1882 constitution would jeopardize the repayment of the Egyptian debt was a major factor that pushed the British to intervene. Anglo-Indian and French forces occupied Egypt in August 1882 to restore “political stability”. The British repealed the 1882 constitution and reconstituted parliament under indirect rule such that rural middle class representation decreased precipitously, especially in high cotton districts (Hartnett and Saleh, 2023).

In sum, rural middle class MPs advanced demands and constitutional reforms that posed a credible threat to the Khedival regime, the political power of incumbent landed elites in the ministerial cabinet, and to foreign financial interests. Given rural middle class MPs’ central role in advancing demands for power-sharing and democratization.

6.2.2 Mechanism: Social Conflict

We expect that social conflict between landed elite interests and the rural middle class are more likely to emerge in agriculturally productive regions. In the Egyptian parliament, this should mean that rural middle class MPs from high cotton districts are more likely to voice reformist positions on matters related to scarce factors of production: land and labor.

Table 4 shows that after 1876, high cotton MPs were more likely to express reformist views on state coercion of labor, which legally allowed landed elites to monopolize landless rural labor (column 6). Given that land was not a scarce commodity relative to labor, we see that it was also not as politicized. High cotton MPs are more likely to make procedural interventions about land (column 2), but in general we do not find evidence of social conflict over land. In the minutes, MP debates on land revolve around land taxes and decentralizing systems of land management rather than land access per se. On the question of land taxes, MPs in the early parliaments did not express positions that would directly affect the landed elite. Even in parliamentary sessions that took place in the contentious post-1876 period, discussions about land taxes frequently involved questions to the Minister of Finance or requests to consult over the provisions of laws. Indeed, in the most progressive MP debates tended to focus on the locus of political authority to make decisions over land taxation rather than the status of the land itself.

In many ways, this comports with theories of political psychology that see politicians as rent-maximizers. As medium landowners, many rural middle class would have gained land through policies like the Muqabala Laws of 1871 and 1874 that allowed individuals to pay six years of taxes up front in exchange for inalienable rights to property. The sedate tone and less critical content of MP debates suggests that land was not the decisive factor conditioning rural intra-elite conflict during this period.

Social conflict over labor is evident in the MP speeches across parliaments and intensifies after the 1876 default. As early as 1868, rural middle class MPs criticized two major coercive labor institutions that supported landed elite agricultural production: the *corvée* and peasant labor on landed estates. The *corvée* entailed the forced labor of peasants to maintain irrigation canals. Given the scarcity of local labor, the MPs discussed several initiatives that would reduce landed elite control over the *corvée*, such as abolishing the *corvée* requirement during the cotton sowing and harvest seasons. MP opinion was divided, particularly in the early parliamentary sessions. By the mid-1870s, after the banning of slavery, rural middle class demands become more progressive and

Table 4: Cotton Suitability, Egypt's 1876 Default, and Parliamentary Demand for Institutional Reform: Land and Labor Institutions

	(1) Private Property (Reformist)	(2) Private Property (Procedural)	Land (3) Land Tax (Reformist)	(4) Land Tax (Procedural)	(5) Other	(6) State Coercion (Reformist)	Labor (7) State Coercion (Procedural)	(8) Other
Cotton × Post-1876	9.90 (9.64)	4.58* (2.67)	-2.76 (9.83)	3.81 (3.05)	4.57 (5.73)	17.34* (8.85)	3.99 (8.15)	-1.39 (6.57)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Session FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters (Districts)	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
Obs (MP-Session)	292	292	292	292	292	292	292	292
R ²	0.20	0.20	0.22	0.24	0.20	0.21	0.23	0.33
Av. Dep. Var. 1866–1869	8.91	0.82	26.48	3.08	9.29	3.91	7.42	19.53

Notes: The sample is at the MP and parliamentary session level. It is restricted to rural middle class MPs localized at the district or village levels. Controls include the interaction of the post-1876 dummy variable with each of wheat yield, wheat area, beans yield, beans area, barley yield, barley area, measured in 1877. Standard errors clustered at the district level are in parentheses. The regressions include the parliamentary cycles from 1866 to 1882: 1866–1869, 1870–1873, 1876–1879, and 1881–1882. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

present a direct challenge to landed elites' monopoly over labor.

The corvée remained a focal point for rural middle class MP contention against the landed elite's dominance of local labor markets. MPs proposed imposing a work tax or exacting a monetary payment from landless farmers to exempt them from corvée service, exempting landless farmers from the corvée altogether, reducing the size of the corvée, and even proposing that peasants resident on landed estates be able to buy their way out of corvée labor. Another debate argued that peasants should be replaced with machines to dredge canals.

MPs also debated policies that would increase the welfare of the peasant labor force through several channels. During the 1876-1879 parliamentary cycle, MPs suggested granting subsidies to peasants to compensate for fallow land. They proposed building more rural public primary schools with a focus on agricultural education, the ostensible beneficiaries being the children of the rural lower and middle classes. This proposal mirrors the logic behind the factory schools in industrializing contexts, where schools were intended to expand the skilled labor force to meet producers' demand. In this rural context, proposing the education of the rural lower classes constituted a direct challenge to the land elites' monopoly on rural labor.

Rural middle class MPs summoned the ministers of Public Works and Interior for multiple question-and-answer sessions over labor issues. These MPs demanded progress reports from the ministers, budgetary audits of the respective ministries' projects, and pushed back against the Council of Ministers' plans to requisition peasants for work that would primarily benefit the large estates. When the Interior Ministry planned to use the local bureaucratic apparatus to track *fellaheen* who left the land and migrated elsewhere (for taxation and labor purposes), rural middle class MP Usman al-Hormeel advocated for the peasant's right "as a human to settle in any place he desires. It is not right to collect them and return them to their place of origin."¹⁸

After the 1876 default, rural middle class MPs became emboldened in their attempts to change the status quo of rural labor. Seven rural middle class MPs co-sponsored a

¹⁸ 7 December 1876.

petition with three effendis on 14 January 1879 to push back against the requisitioning of rural labor, asking about a provision in a recently issued report: “[i]t was mentioned in the report that the *corvée* is only for public works, and that every healthy male over 15 years of age must report without exception, whether or not he is located in the area where he lives or where he has property [...] This phrase requires further clarification and it is unclear whether this is for the benefit of the estate landowners in particular or for the general population of the country.” In the same petition, the rural middle class MPs asked for broad-based distribution of lands and clarification on rural wages. The escalation of these types of demands continued until the Khedive unilaterally shuttered the parliament in 1879.

In sum, we find support for our argument that rural middle class MPs in high productivity agricultural districts give voice to social conflict over factors of production and make more demands for democratization than their counterparts in low productivity districts. As a final robustness check (Appendix Table 7) we show that other contentious issues like the budget, decentralization, and the procedural internal organization of parliament do not show evidence of the same logic. These “placebo” policies give us confidence that social conflict and demands for democratization are co-occurring for high cotton MPs because they are intrinsically linked, and that the intra-elite conflict that we observe in industrializing societies can also be seen in changing agrarian contexts.

7 Conclusion

We believe the Egyptian case tells an important story about the potential for democratization in globalizing agrarian autocracies. The reforms debated by MPs resulted in meaningful constraints on the executive in Egypt show that social conflict within rural elite strata can lead to procedurally democratic outcomes. Another unfortunate and potentially generalizeable observation from the Egyptian case is that the country’s early democratic potential was stamped out by foreign occupation and colonial rule. For many primary producing economies in the Global South, colonialism and the attendant reorganization of colonized societies militated against the emergence of democratic equilibria, leaving us to wonder about a counter-factual Egypt would be like had Britain never invaded.

We plan to take several steps to refine our empirical approach in this article. First, we are in the process of integrating data from the the 1868 census to more directly measure rural social conflict in our analyses. Although we provide evidence in the appendix from [Saleh \(2021\)](#) that shows high-cotton districts were prone to intense labor conflicts between rising and incumbent elites, we plan to include measures of the rural labor force, slavery, and the population of landed estates to directly measure this mechanism in MP constituencies.

We are in the process of increasing the sophistication of our text analyses. We are working to use word embedding and our labeled corpus to unpack MP attitudes towards social conflict and democratization. We also plan to validate our corpus’ topic label consistency using machine learning approaches of the kind described in our data section (Section 5). Lastly, we will replicate our regression results using supervised machine learning.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Social Classes in 19th Century Egypt

There were three types of landholders, or social classes in rural Egypt, by the end of Ali's rule. First, the peasantry were small landholders who cultivated their own land and held usufruct rights over land.¹⁹

Second, the rural middle class were medium landholders, or the largest landholding peasantry outside large estates, who held usufruct rights on sufficiently large landholdings that required recruiting non-household labor. The changing rural economy and the expansion of the state from center to periphery was accompanied by the creation of a new rural middle class in rural Egypt: the *'umda'*/*umad* (village mayor) and *shaykh/shuyukh al-balad* (village headman). Chalcraft (2005) dates the emergence of the *'umda* to abolition of tax farming in 1814, at which time wealthier landholders were appointed to exercise coercive authority over a village or group of villages.²⁰ The village headmen were more numerous than the *'umad*, were typically medium landholders who at once represented the interests of the state and the villagers.²¹

Third, the landed elite (53% of land in 1844) were absentee large landholders who lived in cities and enjoyed full private property rights on large estates that were formed by confiscating either barren land or usufruct land whether deserted or tax-paying.²² Large estates paid a lower land tax than the usufruct landholdings of the peasantry and the rural middle class. The landed elite were the highest stratum of the Egypt's political elite and consisted of Ottoman-Egyptian notables and Europeans in the immediate social orbit of the Viceroy. Muhammad Ali Pasha started to award land grants to favored courtiers in 1826, nearly twenty years prior to the dissolution of the monopoly system (Barakat 1977, Cole 1993, Cuno 1992). Ali's successors continued to award estates with low tax rates, creating a new landed nobility that was well-positioned to benefit from the cotton boom (Cole 1993, p. 56).

Social conflict evidence (Saleh 2023).

8.2 Topic Coding

1. MP Debates, Parliamentary Organization

¹⁹Under the usufruct, the state was the legal owner of land. The usufruct was secure: it was permanent, transferable, and hereditary upon state's approval. However, unlike private property rights, the usufruct could be lost if the land tax is not paid (i.e., if land is deserted). The introduction of private property rights on usufruct land passed through multiple milestones, among which is Viceroy Sa'id's land law of 1858 that reduced barriers to private property rights, and afforded greater opportunities for wealth accumulation among provincial notables (Schölch 1974).

²⁰The *'umda* was the highest ranking local official, although he received no state salary. His responsibilities included taxation, conscription, Corvée labor, and ensuring the fellahin cultivated (Chalcraft 2005).

²¹Like the *'umda*, a headman exercised coercive authority to tax, police, and conscript. They also mediated disputes and acted as a local intermediary while enjoying material benefits from their position like preferential access to irrigation or cheap labor.

²²Landholders of usufruct land could either cultivate their land and pay the land tax or desert it and not pay the tax. In either case, the state could confiscate the land, but the probability of confiscation was probably higher under land desertion.

Table 5: Cotton Boom and Labor Coercion (Saleh 2023)

	No. Slaves (1) Total	No. Non-Slave Locals (2) Total	(3) <i>Fellahs</i>	(4) Soldiers & guards
Large estate \times Cotton \times 1868	-0.44 (57.51)	2116.67*** (728.64)	1264.44** (568.29)	48.77 (31.86)
Village headman \times Cotton \times 1868	8.02* (4.37)			
<i>Fellah</i> \times Cotton \times 1868	0.40** (0.19)			
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cotton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Landholder size FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Landholder size FE \times Cotton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Landholder size FE \times 1868	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cotton \times 1868	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1868 FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters (Villages)	483	504	504	504
Obs (Landholders/Areas)	3900	669	669	669
R^2	0.316	0.344	0.307	0.329
Av. dep. var. in 1848	0.073	63.157	20.236	0.250

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

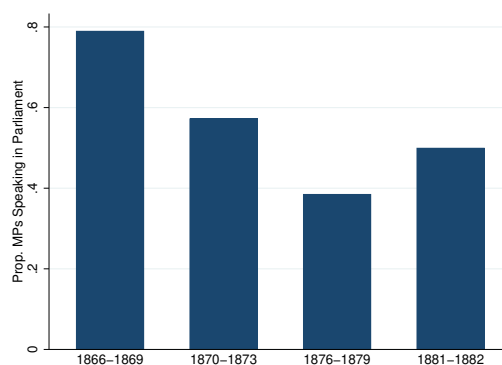


Figure 11: Proportion of MPs Speaking by Parliament

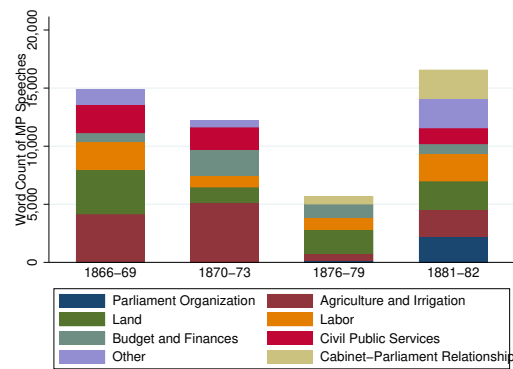


Figure 12: Speech Word Counts by Parliament and Topic

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Parliament Management
1870-1873	Closure of the 1870 Parliamentary Session, Committee Members Elections, MP Leaves.
1876-1879	Parliament Management
1881-1882	Assigning Internal Parliamentary Regulations to Parliament Law Committee, Election of Two Parliamentary Deputy Speakers for the First Time, Internal Parliamentary Regulations, MP Petitions, Opening of the 1881 Parliamentary Session, Parliament Law Committee Members Election, Petitions by the Public About Private Disputes, Response to Khedive Statement, Validating Elections of 5 Extra MPs, Validation of Election Results, Validity of Election Results for Certain Constituencies.

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Cotton Cultivation, Countrywide Irrigation Projects, Importing Irrigation Canal Dredgers.
1870-1873	Barrages and Dykes in Upper Egypt, Cleanup of Mouth of Ibrahimiya Canal, Cotton Worm, Countrywide Irrigation Public Works, Nile Delta Irrigation Canals, Extension of Ibrahimiya Canal, Farms and Watercourses in Upper Egypt, Fields with Undrained Soil, Irrigation Canals in Northern Delta, Upper Egypt Irrigation Issues (Collective Report).
1876-1879	Irrigation Public Works, Public Works in Lower Egypt, Public Works in Upper Egypt.
1881-1882	Banning Usage of Irrigation Steam Engines by Europeans in Fayyum, Banning Usage of Irrigation Steam Engines by Europeans in Qalyubia, Discussion of Ensuring Irrigation Water for Upper Egypt and Protecting it from Nile Floods, Extension of Ibrahimiya Canal, Improving Irrigation Canals in Minya, Irrigation Infrastructure in Beheira Province and Shifting Back from Imported Irrigation Steam Engines, Irrigation Public Works in the Delta, Irrigation Public Works in Upper Egypt, Irrigation Water Allocation in Fayyum, Widening the Openings of Nile Delta Barrages.

2. MP Debates, Agriculture and Irrigation
3. MP Debates, Land (Including Land Tax)
4. MP Debates, Labor
5. MP Debates: Budget and Finances
6. MP Debates: Civil Public Services (Judiciary, Bureaucracy, Education)
7. MP Debates: Other
8. MP Debates, Cabinet-Parliament Relationship

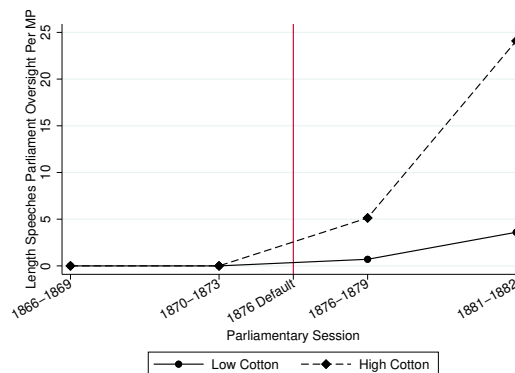


Figure 13: N Words Per Speech on Parliamentary Oversight Per MP

8.3 Egyptian MP Data

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Evaluating Land Tax on Landholders Who Own Landholdings in Multiple Villages and Satellite Settlements, Evaluating Taxes on Lands in Nile Banks, Land Titles Issuance, Mortgage Law, Payment of Land Taxes in Installments, Privatization of Newly Reclaimed Land in al-Sinbellawen District, Reducing Land Taxes in Specific Localities, Village Headmen Evaluation of Land Tax, Women Inheritance of Kharaj Land.
1870-1873	Private Acquisition of Public Grains Stockage Land, Acquisition of Barren Land, Meadows, Jifliks, and Ib'adiyas, under Muqabala Law, Decentralization of Cadastral Surveys in Villages, Centralization of Issuance of Land Tax Receipts, Land Tax Revisions in Cadastral Survey, Ownership and Acquisition of Land around Ismailiyya Canal and Its Relevant Tax Cuts.
1876-1879	Acquisition of Fugitives Landholdings in Their Home Village, Evaluating Land Tax on Land Acquired under Muqabala Law, Issuance of Land Titles in District Courts, Payment of Land Tax Upfront Upon Land Procurement, Reducing Land Tax Because of High Nile Flood, Subsidies to Peasants Compensating for Fallow Land, Timing of Land Taxes Installments.
1881-1882	Abolition of Irrigation Duties for Lands Irrigated by Ibrahimiya Canal, Arrangement of Land Tax Installments, Government Delays in Debt Settlement According to Liquidation Law, Imposing Tithe on Sold Barren Land according to the Law of 1868, Inquiry about Slow Regularization of Muqabala Payments after the 1880 Liquidation Law, Interrogation of Minister of Finance Regarding Costs and Benefits of Cadastral Surveys, MP Inquiries about Benefits and Costs of Cadastral Surveys, Permitting People to Construct Residence on Public Land Used for Grains Stockage, Procedures of Public Land Sales.

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Abolishing Corvée Requirement During Cotton Sowing and Harvest Seasons, Enumeration of Bedouins and Populations of Hamlets, Making Exemption from Military Conscription by Cash Payment to Government and Removing Social Class Eligibility Conditions, Population Census
1870-1873	Labor Needed for the Beheira Canal Drilling, Number of Corvée Workers Required for Public Works, Revising Population Census, Imposing Work Tax on Landless Farmers to Exempt them from Corvée Labor
1876-1879	Controlling Labor Migration to Large Estates, Exempting Landless Farmers from Corvée Labor, Monetary Payment for Exemption from Corvée Labor
1881-1882	Allocation of Corvée Labor Needed for Cleanup of Beheira Canal across Provinces, Draft Decree on Abolition of Privileges of Arab Tribes, Draft Decree on Preservation of Exemption for Arab Tribes from Military Conscription and of Monetary Payment to Avoid Corvée Requirement, Draft Law on Corvée Labor, Inquiry about Monetary Payments by Populations of Jifliks, Izbas, Ib'adiyas, and Kufur, to Avoid Corvée Labor, Reducing Corvée Requirement for Villages, Ib'adiyas, and Jifliks, Replacing Corvée Workers with Machinery for Cleaning Irrigation Canals, Stricter Identification of Arab Tribes for Census Operation and Military Conscription Privileges, Using Corvée- Labor for Certain Canals in Upper Egypt that Are Used Exclusively for Summer Irrigation by Khedival Land

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Government Budget
1870-1873	Government Budget, Poll Tax in Cairo, Returns from Taxes on Weights Carriage and Grains, Taxes on Livestock, Work Tax
1876-1879	Foreign Debt Settlement, Government Budget
1881-1882	Market Regulation of Grains Oligopolists and Banning Exports of Grains, MP Demand to Consult Government Foreign Loans and Treaties

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	Agricultural Councils, Appointment of Village Headmen
1870-1873	Agricultural Councils, Local Criminal Courts, Decentralization of Cadastral Surveys in Villages, Local Dispute Settlement Councils
1876-1879	
1881-1882	Building Public Primary Schools in Rural Areas, Extending Judicial Councils to Southern Nile Valley, Extending Railways, Judicial Councils, and Schools to Southern Nile Valley, Inquiry about Delay in Issuing Civil, Commercial, and Criminal Laws, Law Governing Village Headmen and their Relationship to Government and People, MP Report Regarding Appointment of a Protege as President of a First Degree Mixed Court Contrary to Law, Native Courts Laws and Regulations

Parliament	Coded Matter/Issue
1866-1869	
1870-1873	
1876-1879	Draft of Constitution Law, Rejecting Khedival Decision to dissolve the parliament.
1881-1882	Discussion of Government Report on Parliament Law Draft, Discussion of Ministers' Presentation of Khedival Amendments to Parliament Law Draft, Discussion of Need for New Parliament Law, Discussion of PM (Mahmoud Sami Elbaroudi) Speech in which He Presented New Parliament Law and Three Relevant Khedival Decrees, Discussion of Parliamentary Committee Report on Parliament Law Draft, Discussion of Prime Minister Speech on Parliament Law Draft, Draft Law on Elections, Need for Draft Constitution, Requiring Government Response to MP Inquiries.

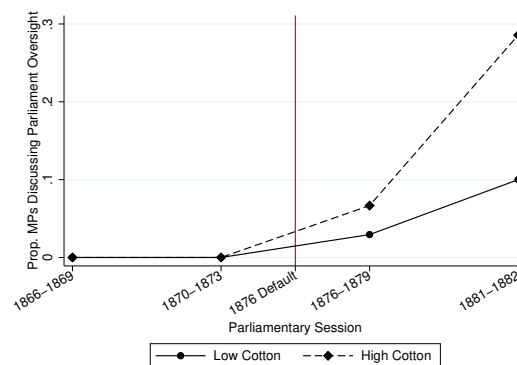


Figure 14: Prop. MPs Making Speeches on Parliamentary Oversight

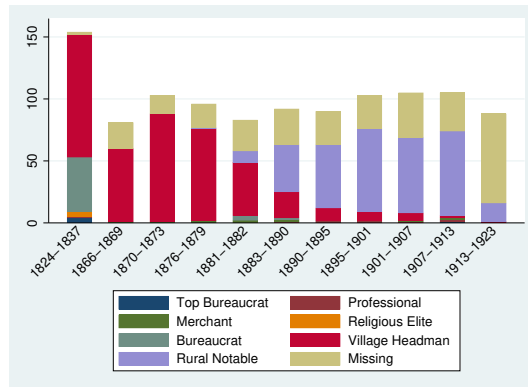


Figure 15: The Occupational Composition of Members of Parliament, 1824-1923

Notes: We combine the two chambers during the bicameral period between 1883 and 1913.

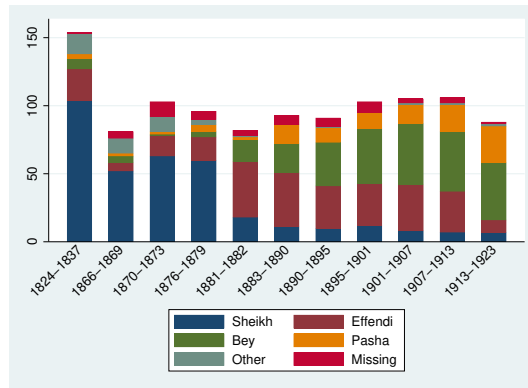


Figure 16: The Honorific Title Composition of Members of Parliament, 1824-1923

Notes: We combine the two chambers during the bicameral period between 1883 and 1913.

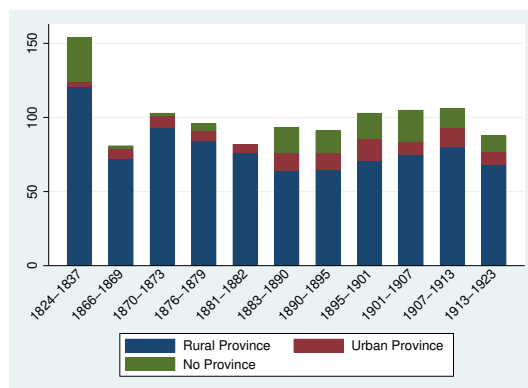


Figure 17: The Urban-Rural Status of the Parliamentary Constituency of Members of Parliament, 1824-1923

Notes: We combine the two chambers during the bicameral period between 1883 and 1913.

Table 6: Coding of Social Class

Class	Title	Occupation	Constituency
Aristocrats (300)	Pasha (90), Bey (209), Other (1)	Missing (173), Notable (97), Bureaucrat (10), Business (6), Top bureaucrat (5)	Missing (74), Urban (46), Rural (173)
Rural Middle Class (684)	Sheikh (378), Effendi (238), Other (50), Missing (18)	Village headman (409), Notable (167), Missing (83), Bureaucrat (22), Professional (2), Business (1)	Rural (684)
Urban Bourgeoisie (98)	Effendi (53), Sheikh (30), Other (7), Missing (8)	Notable (39), Missing (28), Bureaucrat (17), Business (3), Professional (7), Religious Elite (4)	Urban (98)
Missing (20)	Missing (20)	Missing (20)	Rural (5), Urban (11), Missing (4)

Notes: Occupation, title, and constituency are defined based on the first parliamentary cycle in which an MP appears.

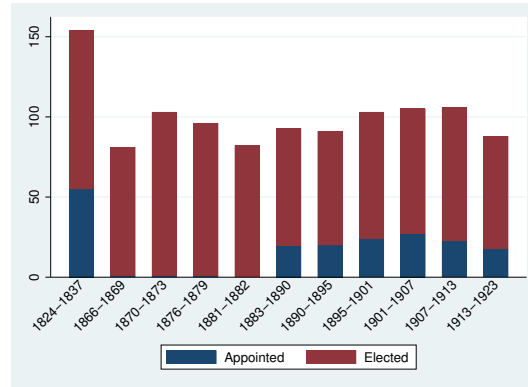


Figure 18: Members of Parliament by Elected versus Appointed Status, 1824-1923

Notes: We combine the two chambers during the bicameral period between 1883 and 1913.

Table 7: Cotton Suitability, Egypt's 1876 Default, and Parliamentary Demand for Institutional Reform: Other Institutions

	Budget			Public Services		Political	
	(1) Budget (Reformist)	(2) Budget (Procedural)	(3) Other	(4) Decentralization (Reformist)	(5) Decentralization (Procedural)	(6) Other	(7) Other
Cotton × Post-1876	-2.26 (4.44)	12.19 (9.81)	4.20 (4.77)	-12.38 (11.25)	5.11 (3.69)	1.44 (0.87)	7.99 (6.64)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Session FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clusters (Districts)	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
Obs (MP-Session)	292	292	292	292	292	292	292
R ²	0.18	0.17	0.24	0.28	0.26	0.21	0.17
Av. Dep. Var. 1866-1869	3.67	0.47	4.05	31.21	0.80	0.00	0.00

Notes: The sample is at the MP and parliamentary session level. It is restricted to rural middle class MPs localized at the district or village levels. Controls include the interaction of the post-1876 dummy variable with each of wheat yield, wheat area, beans yield, beans area, barley yield, barley area, measured in 1877. Standard errors clustered at the district level are in parentheses. The regressions include the parliamentary cycles from 1866 to 1882: 1866-1869, 1870-1873, 1876-1879, and 1881-1882. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.



Figure 19: Cotton and Cereals Yield Per Feddan in 1877