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How Merchant Towns Shaped Parliaments: From the Norman Conquest of England to the Great Reform Act†

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We study the emergence of urban self-governance in the late medieval period. We focus on England after the Norman Conquest of 1066, building a novel comprehensive dataset of 554 medieval towns. During the Commercial Revolution (twelfth to thirteenth centuries), many merchant towns obtained Farm Grants: the right of self-governed tax collection and law enforcement. Self-governance, in turn, was a stepping stone for parliamentary representation: Farm Grant towns were much more likely to be summoned directly to the medieval English Parliament than otherwise similar towns. We also show that self-governed towns strengthened the role of Parliament and shaped national institutions over the subsequent centuries. (*JEL* D02, D72, D73, K11, K34, N43, N93)

Political institutions and the protection of property rights are important drivers of economic growth and development (cf. North and Thomas 1973; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). In medieval times, institutions throughout Western Europe were shaped by "coalitions of power holders"—influential actors holding military, administrative, and religious power (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). Initially, these included the king, the nobility, and the high clergy. By the early modern period, merchant towns had ascended to the coalition of power holders, and they were prominently represented in a key political institution that exerted constraints on monarchs: Parliament.

In this paper, we study the process by which medieval merchant towns gained direct representation in Parliament and shaped the evolution of this institution

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over the subsequent centuries. This process was triggered by the Commercial Revolution—a surge in economic activity in Western Europe beginning in the eleventh century (Lopez 1976). The rise of trade went hand-in-hand with the emergence of municipal autonomy of cities across Europe. Soon thereafter, monarchs summoned towns' representatives in general assemblies that evolved into parliaments. We study the emergence of municipal self-governance and parliamentary representation in the prominent context of England—"the mother of parliaments"[1]—and follow its evolution over six centuries. We document that urban self-governance was an important factor for nationwide institutional development.

Our analysis begins with the Norman Conquest of England in 1066—a key turning point in English history. The Normans asserted strong control over the territory and replaced the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite with their own (Root 1994, p. 16). This resulted in largely homogeneous formal institutions at the onset of the Commercial Revolution, so that the Conquest provides an ideal starting point for our analysis.

Our argument is based on both the historical record and on detailed newly assembled data regarding the liberties of medieval English boroughs (towns with a market and a trading community). We build a novel dataset for all 555 boroughs that existed before 1348 (using the time of the Black Death as a natural breakpoint). For each borough, we code its institutional history between 1066 and 1832, including Charters of Liberties, parliamentary representation, and the borough's position during critical junctures such as the Civil War or the Great Reform Act. We also code borough-level characteristics such as taxable wealth assessed by the Normans in 1086, historical commercial importance, and geographic features. Our analysis is organized into three parts.

The first part of our paper studies the emergence of self-governing towns. After the Norman Conquest, the English Crown relied on tax farming to collect ordinary revenues. In each shire, the king appointed a sheriff ("shire reeve") to "farm" the collection of taxes and provide law enforcement in both rural areas and towns. This system was ill-equipped to efficiently handle merchant affairs in the wake of the Commercial Revolution. As a result, communities of merchants sought more autonomy in their fiscal and judicial matters. Beginning in the twelfth century, some merchant towns and the king entered a mutually beneficial agreement: in exchange for paying higher ordinary (annual) taxes to the king, these boroughs received *Farm Grants*—Charters of Liberty that granted autonomy in tax collection and law enforcement. Farm Grants allowed the community of townsmen to appoint their own local officials, and they effectively separated these towns' jurisdictions from that of the surrounding shires (Jolliffe 1937, pp. 323–24).

By 1348, 90 out of the 555 boroughs had obtained Farm Grants. We show that Farm Grants were particularly likely to be granted to royal boroughs with geographic characteristics conducive to trade (location on navigable rivers, the sea coast, or Roman roads). We also use other proxies, as well as historical evidence, to show that Farm Grant boroughs were commercially more important in medieval times. This

[1] Original quote attributed to British politician John Bright in 1865 (*Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, revised fourth edition, 1996, p. 141).

supports our argument that Farm Grants were particularly valuable to commercial towns, where the need for an efficient and specialized administration was greatest.

The second part of our empirical analysis connects Farm Grants to towns' representation in Parliament. A central purpose of Parliament was to organize the collection of *extra-ordinary* taxes in "cases of necessity" (e.g., wars).[2] From the late thirteenth century onward, it became increasingly common for the Crown to seek consent to these taxes in Parliament not only from the lords and the clergy, but also from representatives of local communities. Common rural and urban tax payers (freeholders) in each shire elected two knights of the shire to represent them in Parliament. In addition, selected towns were *directly* summoned to Parliament, as separate constituencies from their surrounding shire. We show that Farm Grants were "stepping stones" in this process: boroughs that had obtained municipal autonomy were about 40 percentage points more likely to be summoned directly (relative to a mean of 23 percent), giving them a separate voice (and ears) in Parliament.[3]

The historical record suggests that the direct representation of Farm Grant towns in Parliament was the result of their administrative independence. As Pollard (1920, p. 112) noted, "The separate representation of cities and boroughs was, no doubt, due to the varying degrees of immunity from the jurisdiction of the shire courts which they enjoyed." Self-governed boroughs had both the ability to resist tax levying by shire officials and the administrative capacity to assess and collect taxes themselves. By directly summoning autonomous boroughs to Parliament, the royal administration ensured their cooperation in collecting extra-ordinary taxes and their coordination with the rest of the realm (cf. Hoyt 1948; Pasquet, 1964). We argue that this process gave rise to a virtuous re-enforcing relationship between urban self-governance and "national" institutions in England over the subsequent centuries.

In the third part of our analysis, we document how Farm Grant boroughs maintained their autonomy and shaped national institutions. Starting in the sixteenth century, the mounting fiscal needs of the English Crown led to tensions with Parliament. The Crown attempted to circumvent parliamentary resistance by establishing a system of patronage, e.g., by seeking to install friendly oligarchies in towns' governing bodies and meddle with parliamentary elections. The relatively broad elites of self-governing towns had a natural interest in an effective Parliament that acted as a check vis-à-vis the Crown, protecting their autonomy, their relatively open local institutions, and the ability to collectively negotiate extra-ordinary taxes. Correspondingly, we find that self-governing boroughs resisted royal attempts of meddling and patronage: they remained more independent from the Crown in

[2] Parliament was an efficient and expedient way to hold negotiations with many stakeholders. See for example Bates and Lien (1985, p. 56) who observe that "bargaining for taxes was costly to monarchs. Monarchs therefore appear to have desired to bargain with fewer agents—ones representative of the set of all agents." Negotiating taxes in Parliament also helped to legitimize them, avoiding protests (Strayer 1947).

[3] The timing supports our interpretation of Farm Grants as "stepping stones" for towns' direct representation in Parliament: among the 64 Farm Grant boroughs that were represented by 1348, 58 were summoned to Parliament *after* they had received Farm Grants, and only six were first summoned and then received a Farm Grant. Among the latter six boroughs, three had other forms of municipal autonomy that we discuss below. Nevertheless, we make the conservative choice to exclude all six boroughs from our regression analysis (none of our results change if we instead include these boroughs).

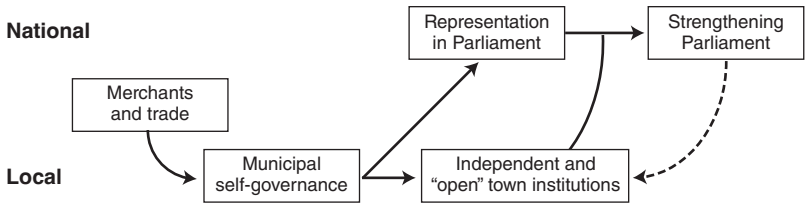

Diagram: Steps of the Argument

appointing their local governing bodies, and they had a wider franchise in electing their Members of Parliament (MPs). In addition, Farm Grant boroughs protected and strengthened Parliament during critical junctures. The volunteer troops who fought on the side of the parliamentarians during the Civil War in 1642 were significantly more likely to come from Farm Grant boroughs. The Civil War and the events that followed prevented a weakening of municipal liberties, strengthened trading interests, and resulted in greater parliamentary control over the Crown (Jha 2015). Finally, we show that medieval Farm Grants are a strong predictor of a borough's MPs voting in favor of the Great Reform Act of 1832. The reform was a crucial step in the democratization of England that further reduced patronage and made Parliament more representative of the newly industrialized localities, thereby enhancing its legitimacy (Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Aidt and Franck 2015). The Reform Act also paved the way to uniform municipal institutions and franchise rules across England and is therefore a natural end point for our analysis.

The diagram below summarizes the steps of our argument, from the emergence of municipal self-governance of merchant boroughs to their representation in Parliament, which they supported because it helped them to protect their liberties and open local institutions against royal interference. We discuss the nature of this interaction between urban self-governance and nationwide institutions for other European countries and shed light on the conditions that arguably made it virtuous in the case of England. We argue that the presence of a strong monarchy in England during the Commercial Revolution allowed merchant communities to gain municipal autonomy and representation in a well-functioning Parliament. This protected England from the institutional decline that occurred in much of Continental Europe after the fifteenth century, where tax farming, the sale of offices, and patronage became prominent, and where parliaments were increasingly bypassed.

An important limitation of our analysis is that Farm Grants were not randomly assigned; our results reflect correlations that could also be driven by omitted variables. For example, borough wealth may have driven both Farm Grants and seats in Parliament. While we ultimately cannot meet the standards for identification in randomized control trials, we present ample historical and empirical evidence that supports a causal link between administrative autonomy and parliamentary representation of boroughs. In particular, we use a difference-in-difference (DD) setup that explores the following two dimensions: First, the historical evidence links administrative autonomy to merchant activity. Correspondingly, we find that trade-favoring geography of medieval boroughs (navigable rivers, sea coast, and ancient Roman

roads) strongly predicts Farm Grants. However, trade may have driven institutional outcomes via channels other than administrative autonomy. This leads to the second dimension, which exploits England's historical setting where boroughs belonged either directly to the king (royal boroughs), or were under the control of a local mesne (lay or ecclesiastical) lord. For historical reasons that we describe in Section II, Farm Grants were almost exclusively granted to royal boroughs, while mesne boroughs very rarely obtained administrative autonomy. Extra-ordinary taxation and the process of summoning to Parliament, on the other hand, was the same for royal and mesne boroughs. Consequently, mesne boroughs can serve as a "control group" to test if trade geography predicts towns' direct representation in Parliament independent of Farm Grants. Indeed, we find no such relationship for mesne boroughs—in the absence of Farm Grants, merchant towns were not more likely to be directly summoned to Parliament. Combining these two dimensions, our DD setup uses trade geography *interacted* with royal borough status to predict Farm Grants in the first stage of a two-stage least squares (2SLS) framework. The second-stage results for parliamentary representation (which control for trade and royal status) are very similar in both magnitude and significance to our main results.

Figure 1 illustrates our empirical approach, zooming in on the area around Lincoln, which had been the first English borough to receive a Farm Grant in 1130. The figure shows the location of royal and mesne boroughs, using circles to illustrate that Farm Grant boroughs were administratively separated from their surrounding shires. Three features stand out: (i) royal and mesne boroughs are relatively evenly distributed, and many boroughs of both types were located on rivers, the sea coast, or Roman roads; (ii) among the boroughs on trade routes, many of the royal ones obtained Farm Grants, but very few of the mesne ones did so; (iii) many of the Farm Grant boroughs were later also summoned to Parliament (indicated by triangles). Figure 1 thus illustrates the link for royal boroughs from trade geography via Farm Grants to parliamentary representation, and the absence of this link for mesne trade boroughs.

Our use of mesne boroughs as a control group in our DD setting hinges on their economic and institutional comparability to royal boroughs. We show that this was largely the case and that differences—where they existed—do not affect our results. For example, we use rich borough-level data from the *Domesday Book* on taxable wealth in 1086 to show that our results are unaffected when we control for wealth, and that they hold even when we use only royal boroughs with *below*-median wealth and mesne boroughs with *above*-median wealth. Similarly, our findings are unchanged when we compare royal Farm Grant boroughs to mesne boroughs with *identical* trade geography and wealth, or with the same number of taxpayers in 1377 (a proxy for borough population). To maintain skepticism about our DD strategy, one would have to argue that other, unobserved factors determined the importance of boroughs, which in turn jointly affected their designation as royal boroughs after the Norman Conquest, their odds of receiving Farm Grants, *and* their representation in Parliament. A systematic selection of boroughs after the Norman Conquest would certainly have comprised the "*Domesday* boroughs"—the 106 most important settlements at the time (62 royal and 44 mesne). We show that our results are robust to excluding the royal *Domesday* boroughs; furthermore, we fully confirm our results

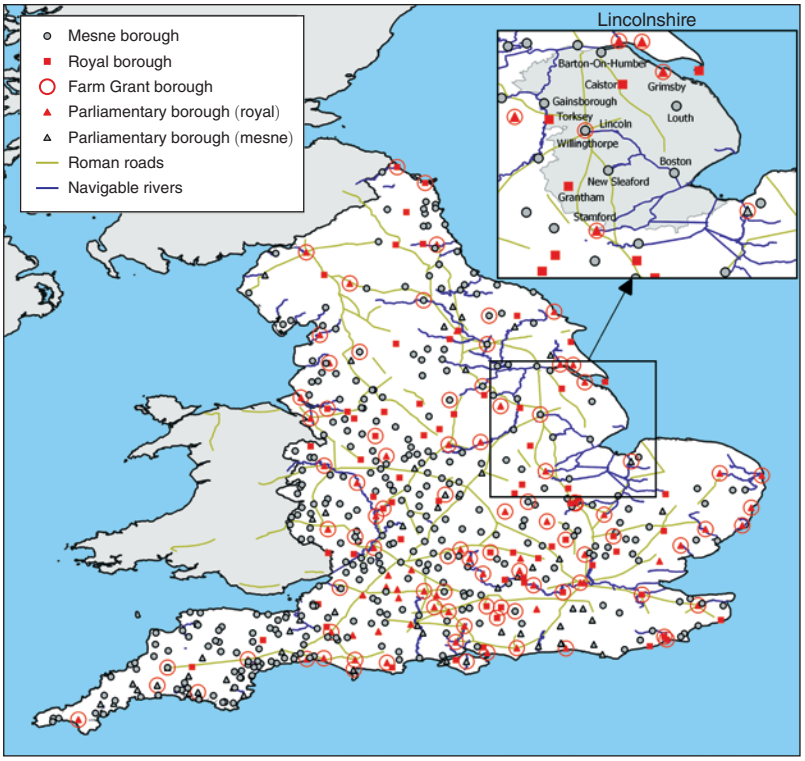

Figure 1. All Boroughs in the Dataset

Notes: The figure shows the location and type of the 555 settlements in our dataset that had obtained borough status by 1348. Solid red symbols indicate the 145 royal boroughs, and gray symbols the 410 mesne boroughs (controlled by local lords). Red circles show the 90 Farm Grant boroughs, illustrating their administrative separation. Boroughs that had been summoned to Parliament by 1348 are shown as triangles (red for royal and gray for mesne boroughs). The figure also shows the location of navigable rivers and of Roman roads that were usable in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

even in a particularly restrictive sample that uses only royal *non-Domesday* boroughs, while using only mesne *Domesday* boroughs as a control group.

For our long-run outcomes for the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, we perform a placebo check for a possible direct role of trade. We use historical records to identify boroughs where exogenous events (such as silting up of rivers) permanently obstructed trade *after* they received Farm Grants. We show that, even in the absence of trade, Farm Grant boroughs differed significantly in long-run institutional outcomes. Table A.28 at the end of the online Appendix summarizes our discussion of identifying assumptions and challenges to a causal interpretation, and it provides links to the empirical and historical evidence that can help to address these.

Our paper makes novel contributions along three main dimensions: First, we document the emergence of medieval self-governance in a large cross section of towns and show that it was linked to merchant activity, as previously suggested (but not empirically established) in the economic history literature. Second, we establish the link between municipal autonomy and towns' representation in Parliament, providing support for a literature in both economic history and organizational economics

that connects administrative autonomy to centralized coordination through assemblies. Third, we document important interactions between municipal autonomy and nationwide institutions and discuss the conditions that rendered these virtuous in the case of England. We review the related literature in Section I. In Section II we present historical background on England after the Norman Conquest. Section III presents our empirical results on Farm Grants, and Section IV, on representation in Parliament by 1348. Section V examines institutional features of Farm Grant boroughs and their position during critical junctures throughout the centuries thereafter. Section VI offers a comparative analysis of prominent regions in Western Europe, discussing similarities and differences in the interplay of commerce, municipal autonomy, and institutional development. Section VII concludes.

I. Related Literature

Our paper contributes to literatures in political economy, economic history, and organizational economics. An important field of research investigates the representation of merchant interests in parliaments during the late medieval and early modern period. In North and Thomas (1973); North (1981); North and Weingast (1989); Barzel (1989); and Stasavage (2011), the inclusion of merchant towns in representative assemblies is a way for strong rulers to tie their own hands not to expropriate subjects, thereby strengthening property rights and improving economic outcomes—for a similar reasoning, see Myerson (2008). Epstein (2000) and Grafe (2012) instead emphasize that fragmented jurisdictions in Continental Europe limited central rulers' ability to marshal resources, which led to negotiations over taxation in assemblies, typically involving self-governing towns. In line with our argument, both strands of this literature emphasize that the difficulty of taxing merchants ultimately led to their acquisition of political power. Our paper is the first to empirically establish the link between trade, municipal autonomy, and representation in parliament, tracking a large set of towns over time. This also connects our work to Kiser and Barzel (1991); Greif, Milgrom, and Weingast (1994); Stasavage (2014); and Puga and Trefler (2014).[4]

Our argument is in line with Root (1994); Barzel and Kiser (1997); and Epstein (2000), who state that parliaments were created by monarchs to coordinate the behavior of autonomous jurisdictions and facilitate negotiations over property rights.[5] In the spirit of Levi (1988, 1999), municipal autonomy restricted the ruler's ability to extract resources from towns, which led to their representation in Parliament, where extra-ordinary taxation was organized. This also relates to González de Lara, Greif, and Jha (2008); and Van Zanden, Buringh, and Bosker (2012), who argue that the rise of towns as (semi)autonomous administrations constrained the monarchy in England—long before the Civil War and the Glorious

[4] Other related work includes Greif (2006), who discusses the central role played by "corporations"—voluntary, self-governing, and perpetual associations such as autonomous towns—in the European context. Cantoni and Yuchtman (2014) show that legal institutions (universities) had a positive effect on economic activity in medieval Germany. Bardhan (2002) and Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) establish a connection between inefficient local bureaucracies and local political liberties in the modern context.

[5] This reasoning is also related to theories that link taxation of movable wealth (which could be avoided more easily than taxes on land) to institutional change (Bates and Lien 1985).

Revolution in the seventeenth century. Overall, our empirical findings support the historical arguments in Greif (2008, p. 31) that "political assemblies were composed of individuals and corporate bodies with independent administrative capacity (e.g., feudal lords and self-governed cities) …" and in Van Zanden, Buringh, and Bosker (2012, p. 847) whereby "The key event, in our view, that led to the formation of parliaments, was the communal movement of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries: cities became to a large extent self-governing, and were able, as corporate bodies with rights and privileges, to gain access to what had previously been often a rather informal assembly. This addition of a 'different' social class—the merchants who usually represented the communes—fundamentally changed what had previously been a meeting of a very small elite."[6]

Our second set of results sheds light on the institutional divergence between England and most of the Continent that occurred during the early modern period (Barzel and Kiser 1997; Van Zanden, Buringh, and Bosker 2012). This period was characterized by an increase in the need for revenues by rulers, the rise of patronage, and the consequent institutional instability (cf. Kettering 1986; Root 1994). Gennaioli and Voth (2015) highlight the role played by warfare and initial jurisdictional fragmentation in causing divergence in state capacity across European polities (see also Tilly 1990; Besley and Persson 2009; Dincecco and Katz 2014). We contribute to this strand of literature by emphasizing the interaction between local and "national" institutions in shaping England's institutional path. Our results complement those in Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2005), who find that where "initial" institutions before 1500 placed checks on monarchs and protected property rights, the gains from Atlantic trade post-1500 were particularly large. Also, our findings on the English Civil War complement those in Jha (2015), who shows that financial innovations—i.e., stock ownership in overseas companies—fostered MPs' support for Parliament during the English Civil War, which in turn strengthened parliamentary control over sources of revenues.

Similar to the long-run institutional differences that we document for Farm Grant boroughs in the second part of our paper, Banerjee and Iyer (2005) document long-run economic consequences of differences in historical tax collection systems in rural India: areas where the British colonizers established large landlords for collecting agricultural taxes fared worse in the long run, compared to areas in which local communities were directly and jointly liable for the collection and transfer of taxes to the central administration. Our contribution differs because (i) we do not take differences in the system of tax collection as given; instead, we study their emergence (medieval Farm Grants) after the Norman Conquest, and (ii) we highlight the long-run interactions of local self-governance with nationwide institutions.

Our paper is also related to the literature on the determinants of franchise extensions. One leading explanation is that democratization serves as a commitment device for redistribution under the threat of revolution; see Acemoglu and Robinson

[6] In a paper that follows ours, Cox, Dincecco, and Onorato (2020) examine the role played by wars in fostering parliamentary representation of autonomous municipalities. The findings are in line with our mechanism in a cross-section of medieval European polities. The inverse argument has been used to explain the *absence* of parliaments in other regions: "But there was no institution akin to a parliament in the Ottoman Empire. No organized groups of elites met regularly to constrain the sultan. This was in part because there were no independent cities with which to negotiate […]" (Rubin 2017, p. 189).

(2000) for a theoretical contribution and Aidt and Franck (2015) for empirical results that support this channel. We contribute to this literature by investigating the historical determinants of the political power of urban elites. Our results emphasize the importance of local institutions in explaining the Great Reform Act of 1832. We complement the framework developed in Lizzeri and Persico (2004), whereby oligarchies (that included merchants) may voluntarily extend the franchise to enable a more efficient provision of public goods. Our results regarding the Civil War and the Great Reform Act contribute to the literature on the historical roots of political institutions (Persson and Tabellini 2009; Giuliano and Nunn 2013; Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2016).

Finally, our conceptual framework makes use of building blocks from organizational economics. Farm Grants were agreements in which the king "loaned" decision rights over local institutions to communities of merchants (e.g., Baker, Gibbons, and Murphy 1999). We are also connected to the literature that investigates the trade-off between adaptation and coordination (e.g., Alonso, Dessein, and Matouschek 2008; Rantakari 2008). Farm Grants achieved superior adaptation, and Parliament coordinated these autonomous administrative units.

II. Historical Context: Administration of Medieval English Towns

This section provides a brief historical background describing the administration of towns (boroughs) in England after the Norman Conquest. While we introduce the key sources for our borough-level dataset here, we delegate the description of the individual outcome and explanatory variables to the respective empirical sections below. Online Appendix Table A.1 lists all variables, their summary statistics, and the corresponding section or online Appendix with data sources and detail on coding.

A. *The Norman Conquest*

In 1066, William the Conqueror landed at Pevensey, heading a large French-Norman army that defeated the Anglo-Saxons. The conquest resulted in a dramatic change in land ownership, as documented in the *Domesday Book* of 1086.[7] The Normans replaced the entire lay and ecclesiastical Anglo-Scandinavian elite as well as the local administration (Barlow 1961, pp. 94–96). Compared to the Anglo-Saxon period, the Normans strengthened the control over the territory by greatly diminishing the power of the earls and imposing a homogeneous feudal society (Brooke 1961). Overall, the Norman Conquest resulted in relatively homogeneous formal institutions across England and thus constitutes an ideal starting point for our analysis.

[7] The *Domesday Book* was an exhaustive survey of all English lands conducted in 1086. The main purpose of the survey was to assess the value of the land and its assets. As Jenkins (2011, pp. 38–39) observes, "The survey […] did more than record. It marshaled Norman England into an administrative whole."

B. *The Commercial Revolution: Boroughs, Markets, and Trade*

Our analysis coincides with the Commercial Revolution—a boom in economic activity driven by events exogenous to England, such as regained access to Mediterranean trade (Pirenne 1925), technological progress (Mokyr 1990; Langdon and Masschaele 2006), and population growth (North and Thomas 1973; Verhulst 1989). In England, the number of recorded urban settlements increased drastically: Boroughs went from 112 in 1086 to 555 by 1348. Around 150 fairs were established by the end of the twelfth century, and more than 1,000 newly licensed markets were recorded between 1200 and 1349 (Britnell 1981; Masschaele 1997; Langdon and Masschaele 2006).

C. *Territorial Administration and Taxation: Royal and Mesne Territories*

Post-Norman-Conquest England was divided into 39 shires (counties), each composed of manors within which rural and urban settlements (villages and boroughs) coexisted. Boroughs were characterized by the presence of a market and a trading community.[8] After the Conquest, approximately 25 percent of boroughs belonged to the king, 50 percent to lay mesne lords, and 25 percent to ecclesiastical mesne lords.[9]

We collect data on all English settlements that received the status as boroughs by 1348. We code variables on the administrative control of boroughs (royal versus mesne), on taxation, and on local charters of liberties between 1066 and 1348. We draw mainly on the digitized version of original medieval documents (e.g., charters and letter patents collected in the Pipe Rolls, Charter Rolls, Fine Rolls, Close Rolls, and Patent Rolls). We know of 555 boroughs as of 1348, based on the primary data collected by Beresford and Finberg (1973) and Letters et al. (2003). We obtain information on whether these were controlled by royal or mesne lords from the *British History Online*[10]; Ballard (1913); and Ballard and Tait (1923). Our coding yields 145 royal and 410 mesne boroughs (see online Appendix A.2 for detail and for how we address changes in administrative control). As shown in Figure 1, royal boroughs were distributed relatively evenly across England, likely because of the king's need to ensure his influence across the realm immediately after the Conquest. Online Appendix C.1 provides a more detailed discussion of the division into royal and mesne boroughs.

Figure 2 illustrates the administration of royal and mesne boroughs throughout the kingdom. The most important administrative tasks were tax collection and the provision of justice. Shires, which comprised both royal and mesne territories, played a central role.[11] The extent of the shire administration's fiscal and judicial oversight

[8] We focus on boroughs because these were the main locations of merchant activities in medieval and early modern England. Land tenure in boroughs was known as burgage tenure, which was similar to freeholding (Ballard 1913; Tait 1936, p. 134). Burgesses could sell, mortgage, and leave their land property in the borough in inheritance. They could also move as part of their trading activity. However, acquiring the status of burgess in a borough other than that determined by birth was difficult.

[9] Throughout the text, we refer to both lay and ecclesiastical lords as mesne lords. "Mesne" means "middle" in medieval French, referring to the position of mesne lords, who had vassals, but were themselves vassals of the king.

[10] *British History Online*, https://www.british-history.ac.uk.

[11] Each shire had a shire court, ran by the sheriff (a royal appointee) and his officials. The shire court organized the provision of justice and the collection of taxes in the localities by relying on local courts (hundred, manorial and

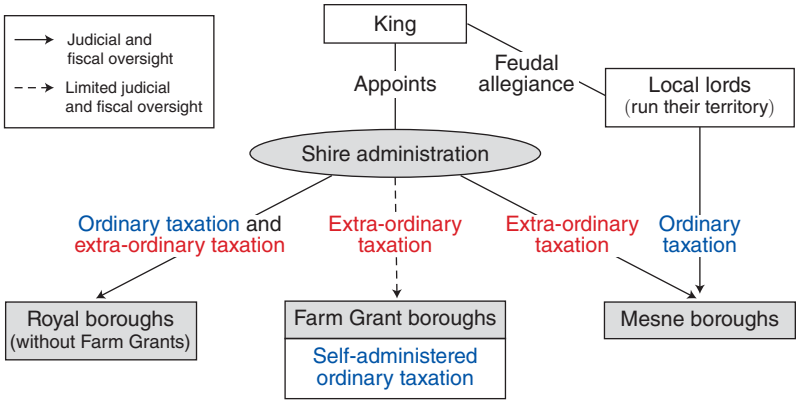

FIGURE 2. ADMINISTRATION IN ROYAL AND MESNE TERRITORIES

Note: The figure illustrates the main administrative layers in royal and mesne territories for the case of boroughs without Farm Grants. See Section IIC for a description of ordinary taxation (tax farming) and extra-ordinary taxation (typically for warfare). For boroughs with Farm Grants, local officials were elected by the borough's burgesses, and tax collection was self-administered by elected officials. This enhanced their administrative power and effectively separated them from the shire administration.

depended on (i) whether the borough was royal or mesne, (ii) the type of taxation, and (iii) whether boroughs had obtained administrative autonomy—most prominently in the form of Farm Grants. We begin by discussing taxation in "regular" boroughs (i.e., without Farm Grants). In this context, it is important to note that the medieval period distinguished between "ordinary" and "extra-ordinary" taxation.

Ordinary Taxation.—Ordinary taxation accrued to the lord of the borough (either the king or the mesne lord). In the royal territory, the contractual arrangement between the king and his tax-collecting officials was known as *tax farming*. The *farm* of a territory was a fixed amount of money representing the sum of all tax revenues from that territory—revenues from land, market tolls, and court fees (Ballard 1904; Masschaele 1997). Farms were customarily fixed for each borough right after the Norman Conquest, based on the *Domesday* survey of 1086. The sheriff acted as tax farmer for the shire, and he appointed the officials (bailiffs) in the royal boroughs that contributed to the shire's farm. With the booming economic activity during the Commercial Revolution, the king began to auction off the right to collect the farm in each shire. The official who won the auction became sheriff and retained any tax revenue that he collected in excess of his bid (Ballard 1913).[12] Sheriffs were often drawn from the royal court; they thus had limited knowledge of local economic conditions and lacked the knowledge necessary to administer justice over commercial contracts (Poole 1955; Harris 1964; Carpenter 1976; Green 1986). Due to the frequent bidding for the office,

borough courts) ran by bailiffs. Within boroughs, bailiffs administered justice, ran markets, collected tolls, and organized the maintenance of town walls and streets (Tait 1936; McIntosh 1986). In principle, local courts were subordinated to the shire court. While the shire court handled major offenses such as capital crimes, borough courts dealt with minor local offenses such as disputes between merchants (Cam 1963). Their efficiency was thus a crucial prerequisite for commerce in merchant towns.

[12] See Ballard (1913) and Green (1986). In Farm Grant boroughs, the sheriff's oversight was restricted, as we discuss below.

sheriff positions also had a relatively high turnover, with typical term lengths of three to five years (Heiser 1997). The short tenure invited widespread predatory behavior (see online Appendix B.1). In mesne territories, the local lords were entitled to ordinary taxes. Accordingly, mesne lords appointed the officials who collected ordinary taxes and presided over local courts (Denholm-Young 1964). Online Appendix B.4 provides further detail on ordinary tax collection in boroughs.

Extra-Ordinary Taxation.—Monarchs could request an extra-ordinary "aid" from all subjects in specific situations that affected the whole realm (e.g., wars), known as "cases of necessity" (Harriss 1975). Until the mid-thirteenth century, the king and lords alone acknowledged "cases of necessity" and collected taxes known as *tallage* on their territories. These taxes were fixed at customary levels and thus did not require local wealth assessment. By the second half of the thirteenth century, the king introduced proportional taxes on assessed movable wealth in order to tap into the rising incomes at the height of the Commercial Revolution (Mitchell 1951). This change in the base of extra-ordinary taxation required that autonomous towns also consented to "cases of necessity," giving rise to their representation in Parliament (as we discuss further in Section IVA). These taxes on movables were uniform across boroughs; that is, royal and mesne boroughs contributed at the same tax rate (Willard 1934, p. 10 and Mitchell 1914, pp. 351–52). For instance, "in 1296 all towns alike paid an eight [of their movable goods]" (Pasquet 1964, p. 152).[13] The shire court coordinated the assessment and collection of extra-ordinary taxes for *both* royal and mesne boroughs, and the sheriff enforced their collection alongside royal assessors of movable wealth (Pasquet 1964, p. 143).

III. Farm Grants: Municipal Autonomy in the Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries

This section examines the emergence of municipal autonomy in the late medieval period. We first explain the historical context that rendered a specific subset of boroughs particularly likely to obtain Farm Grants: merchant towns in royal territories. We then present empirical results that underline an interaction between trade-favoring geography and the royal ownership of boroughs. These results also form the first stage of our subsequent analysis that examines possible causal effects of municipal autonomy on institutional outcomes.

A. *Background: Farm Grants in Royal and Mesne Territories*

Farm Grants in Royal Territories.—Because of the size of the royal territory, medieval English kings had no choice but to delegate administrative control over boroughs. Initially, borough administration was fully embedded within the shire system under the control of the sheriffs. During the Commercial Revolution, the rise in boroughs' trading activity created the need for a more specialized

[13] In the early thirteenth century, a selected subset of "taxation boroughs" (both royal and mesne) occasionally paid a higher rate. We discuss this in online Appendix D.7 and show that our results hold when focusing only on these boroughs, or when excluding them.

administration.[14] The key to achieve the necessary efficiency improvements lay in allowing urban merchant communities to run borough administrations themselves (cf. Kiser and Barzel 1991).

Starting under the reign of Henry I, many boroughs obtained "Farm Grants"—the right to appoint borough officials and collect ordinary taxation themselves (Madox 1726). Lincoln was the first borough to receive a Farm Grant in 1130.[15] Boroughs paid the king in exchange for these liberties. Payments included a one-time lump-sum (*fine*) and/or an *increment* on the farm (which had previously been collected by the sheriff). The fine was often used to quickly raise money during wars (Tait 1936); this can explain the close association between Farm Grants and external wars (see online Appendix B.2). The Charter of Andover (granted in 1205) illustrates the *increment* on the annual farm implied by Farm Grants:

> Know ye that we have granted [...] to our burgesses of Andover our manor of Andover with all its appurtenances at fee farm, to hold to them and their heirs of us and our heirs by the ancient farm, to wit, at £80 a year, and as increment £15 which they formerly gave us for having the said manor at farm during our pleasure, and in addition £10 which they afterwards added for having the said manor at fee farm, and this farm, to wit, £105 in the whole, they shall pay at our Exchequer yearly to us by their own hands. (Ballard 1913, p. 228)

The Charter first notes that Andover was worth a farm of £80 a year (collected by royal officials). Andover then agreed to pay an increment of £15 per year for the right of self-administered tax collection, and an extra £10 per year for the right to keep this contract in perpetuity.[16] Where detailed records survived, they suggest that Andover's grant is representative, and that Farm Grants typically constituted a net gain in tax revenue to the king (Ballard 1913, pp. lxxvi–lxxvii). This gain for the king arguably compensated for the (expected) loss of administrative control and future information about local economic conditions.

Farm Grants were not imposed; they were an option for burgesses. This implies that burgesses must have benefited as well. Bristol's petition to the king in 1283 illustrates that merchants were well-aware of the benefits of Farm Grants:

> Since none can know so well as those whose work is concerned with merchandise, and who earn their living by it, how to regulate the affairs of merchants properly and honestly, the Commonalty of Bristol entreats the Lord King that, if he should wish to grant his town at farm to anyone, he should concede it to them, since they would be prepared to give as much for it as any outsider. For an outside farmer would not seek it except for his

[14] Accordingly, several statutes sought to address the need for registered commercial contracts and more potent dispute resolution (e.g., the Statute of Acton Burnell in 1283, the Statute of Merchants in 1285, and the Statute of Westminster II in 1285). See Ballard and Tait (1923); Tait (1936); Poole (1955); Powicke (1962); Cam (1963).

[15] Farm Grants were only introduced after the Norman Conquest; they did not exist during Anglo-Saxon times, as documented by Maitland (1921, p. 204); Tait (1936, p. 71); Barlow (1961, p. 25); and Reynolds (1977, pp. 95–96). Besides Farm Grants, there were also other Charters of Liberties granted after the Norman Conquest; for instance, the right to hold a market, to prevent the entry of royal officials, or freedom from tolls throughout the realm. We predominantly use Farm Grants, but also explore other charters in our empirical analysis.

[16] Farm Grants, even those issued in perpetuity, were subject to revocation: in case burgesses failed to pay the agreed-upon farm, the king would temporarily remove these liberties and send royal officials into town.

> own personal gain, which would be to the serious loss of the Commonalty. And the Commonalty seeks it to farm, not for the sake of profit, but to safeguard, according to the law merchant, both themselves and others coming there. (Cronne 1946, pp. 42–43).

Farm Grants transferred the right to appoint the entire borough administration from the sheriff to the burgesses (Gross 1906; Ballard 1913; Tait 1936). This separated a borough's jurisdiction from that of the surrounding shire, thereby curbing the sheriff's fiscal and judicial oversight (see Figure 2). As a result, boroughs with Farm Grants developed significant administrative capabilities; they typically handled their own legal disputes and selected a more commercially specialized administration. Farm Grants also established relatively open municipal institutions: in principle, all male burgesses had a say in the election of a Farm Grant borough's officials. For example, the Ipswich Dom-Boc of 1291 states that "… the whole town of the borough of Ipswich gathered in the churchyard of St. Mary at Tower to elect two bailiffs and four coroners for the town, according to the specifications of the charter of the aforesaid lord King [John]."[17] In practice, councils composed of wealthy individuals—mostly merchants, sometimes acting through guilds—were often in charge of choosing officials (Lyon 1960; Martin 1963; Evans 1974). Despite this tendency toward oligarchization, the interests of merchants and craftsmen were represented to a much larger extent than in royal boroughs without Farm Grants (where the sheriff appointed local officials) and in mesne boroughs (where the local lord was in charge of appointments).[18]

Data on Farm Grants.—For each of the 555 settlements with borough status by 1348, we examine a variety of historical sources that list borough charters and other liberties (see online Appendix A.3). Overall, 90 boroughs had received Farm Grants by 1348. This aggregate number conceals a marked heterogeneity between royal and mesne boroughs: among the 145 royal boroughs, 74 received Farm Grants (51.0 percent). In stark contrast, among the 410 boroughs controlled by mesne lords, only 16 obtained Farm Grants (3.9 percent).[19] Given the conservative coding choice explained in footnote 3, our regression analyses exclude the six boroughs (four royal and two mesne) that were summoned to Parliament before receiving a Farm Grant. This leaves 549 boroughs in our regression sample.

(*The Absence of*) *Farm Grants in Mesne Territories.*—Farm Grants were almost exclusively granted to boroughs in royal territories, despite the fact that these merely accounted for one-fourth of all boroughs, and despite the economic importance

[17] Original text (in Latin) from Gross (1890). Translation adapted from "History of Medieval Ipswich" (http://users.trytel.com/ tristan/towns/ipswich2.html).

[18] For some Farm Grant boroughs, *British History Online* provides detailed accounts of their broad elections: In Colchester (https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol9/pp48-57), burgesses met in the "moot hall" to elect their borough officers; in Bedford (https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/beds/vol3/pp15-21), borough officers were annually "elected by the whole vill;" and Droitwich (https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/beds/vol3/pp15-21) was considered to be of a "democratic type," because "no powerful council was developed, and the burgesses always retained a share in the government of the borough." In thirteenth century Norwich, officials were chosen by an annually elected body of 24 (usually wealthy) citizens. In Exeter, surviving records indicate that, in the 1260s, 36 electors chose the chief officials of the city (Attreed 2001, pp. 14–22).

[19] Figure A.1 in the online Appendix provides a map of Farm Grants, showing that there is no apparent clustering; Farm Grant boroughs are spread relatively evenly across England.

of many mesne boroughs.[20] This difference is compatible with the mechanism described above: mesne lords controlled much smaller territories than the king and thus exerted a more direct control over their administration (Tait 1936). Many of them also had castles or other dwellings in their boroughs and thus possessed detailed local knowledge. Consequently, lords had less need to delegate the control over borough administrations.[21] This limited the ability of trading communities in mesne boroughs to become independent administrative units.

Online Appendix C provides numerous discussions and additional results on the determinants of Farm Grants and on the role of royal versus mesne ownership. Online Appendix C.1 discusses the comparability of royal and mesne boroughs both historically and empirically. Online Appendix C.2 further examines the predominance of Farm Grants in royal territories, showing that this finding is highly robust to a host of controls (such as pre-Norman kingdoms, soil quality, and county fixed effects), and that it is not driven by differences between royal and mesne boroughs (such as taxable wealth in 1086 or differential endowments with trade-favoring geography). Online Appendix C.3 presents empirical support that the need to delegate administrative control in the large royal territory motivated the issuance of Farm Grants: it shows that also among mesne lords, those with large territories were more likely to grant administrative autonomy to their towns than those with small territories. Online Appendix C.4 shows that Farm Grant boroughs were more likely to be involved in commercial activities in the fourteenth century.

B. *Empirical Determinants of Farm Grants*

The discussion above highlights two features that motivate our empirical analysis: Farm Grants were particularly beneficial to merchant towns, and the administrative subdivision of the realm rendered them especially attractive in the royal domain. This translates into the following regression for a cross section of boroughs i, where the dependent variable is an indicator for a Farm Grant received by 1348:

$$(1)\quad FarmGrant_i = \alpha + \beta Trade_i + \gamma Royal_i + \delta Trade_i \times Royal_i + \tau \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i,$$

where α is a constant term, $Royal_i$ is a dummy for royal control of borough i, and $Trade_i$ denotes different geographic characteristics of a borough that favor trade: location on a navigable river, location on the sea coast, and location on a Roman

[20] Note that Farm Grants in mesne boroughs could only be granted by their mesne lords. Because the Crown was not the residual claimant of mesne boroughs' ordinary revenues, it did not interfere with their local administrative arrangements.

[21] As Bailey (2007, p. 136) notes, "Mesne boroughs often possessed a narrower range of privileges than royal boroughs, and the freedom of their burgesses to run their own affairs was usually more restricted. The latter was particularly true if the landlord was also resident in the town, and therefore likely to assume an active interest in the town's affairs. These burgesses might have some involvement in the day-to-day administrative tasks, but most of the executive management was vested in the landlord's own officials." A concrete example is the borough of Arundel in south England. The borough was under the control of the Fitzalan mesne lord dynasty, who resided in Arundel Castle. Arundel did not receive a Farm Grant, despite the fact that it "as the trading centre of the honour, had by [the early fourteenth century] developed to quite substantial proportions" (http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/constituencies/arundel). Similarly, Rigby and Ewan (2000, pp. 293–94) observe that "although the seigneurial borough of Boston ranked fifth amongst English towns in the taxation of 1334 [...], it could not compare with even a minor royal borough such as Grimsby [...] in its formal liberties."

road. We code the three trade variables using historical sources, confirming the navigability of rivers in medieval times and the survival of Roman roads after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century (see online Appendix A.4). Finally, $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a vector of control variables, and ε_i is the error term. We expect positive coefficients on $Trade_i$ in the subsample of royal boroughs, and thus also a positive interaction $Royal_i \times Trade_i$.

Table 1 first presents results without interactions in the full sample, showing that the three proxies for trade, as well as royal borough status, are significantly positively associated with Farm Grants (column 1). The trade geography coefficients are even larger when we restrict the sample to royal boroughs (column 2). In contrast, column 3 shows that there is no such relationship in mesne territories. Each of the $Trade_i$ coefficients is small, negative, and statistically insignificant, and all three coefficients together are also far from statistical significance (with a p-value of 0.73). In column 4 we use entropy weights from the balancing algorithm by Hainmueller and Xu (2013) so that the mean and variance of the three trade geography variables are the same for royal and mesne boroughs, ensuring the comparability of the two subsamples (see online Appendix C.1 for detail). The results are almost identical to those in column 3. In column 5 we introduce interaction terms between our trade variables and the status as royal borough. The interaction terms are highly significant, positive, and quantitatively meaningful, while the trade proxies themselves are small and statistically insignificant. These results underline that trade-favoring geography boosted the odds of obtaining Farm Grants only in royal boroughs, in line with the historical evidence discussed above. The same result holds in column 6, where we introduce county fixed effects and control for soil quality (capturing differences in agricultural productivity; see online Appendix A.4 for detail on coding), and when we use entropy balancing by trade geography (column 7).

The specification in regression (1) is the first stage in our subsequent analysis, predicting the emergence of Farm Grants at the borough level. Our interaction-based setup is akin to a DD strategy. This is illustrated in the left panel of Figure 3, which depicts the coefficient sizes and 95 percent confidence intervals for $Trade \times Royal$ and those for $Trade$ from the specification in column 7 in Table 1. The figure underlines the strong predictive power of trade geography for Farm Grants in royal boroughs, and the (precisely estimated) near-zero coefficients for mesne boroughs.

IV. Farm Grants and Representation in Parliament

We now turn to the second step of our argument: the relationship between Farm Grants and representation in Parliament (focusing on the House of Commons, where boroughs and shires were represented). We begin with a discussion of the historical context, which motivates the empirical analysis that follows.

A. *Farm Grants, Extra-Ordinary Taxation, and Parliament*

The medieval English Parliament is intrinsically related to extra-ordinary taxation. The Crown could legitimately collect extra-ordinary taxes in "cases of necessity" such as wars. Following the Magna Carta in 1215, consent to these taxes was increasingly given in assemblies to which only lords and the higher clergy were summoned

Table 1—First Stage: Determinants of Farm Grants—Trade Geography in Royal Territories

	Indicator for boroughs that obtained Farm Grants by 1348						
Boroughs included:	All	Royal	Mesne	Mesne E-weights[a]	All	All	All E-weights[a]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Navigable river	0.107	0.308	−0.015	−0.003	−0.015	0.005	−0.003
	(0.039)	(0.080)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.021)	(0.034)	(0.028)
Sea coast	0.097	0.414	−0.015	−0.020	−0.015	−0.017	−0.020
	(0.031)	(0.084)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.028)	(0.018)
Roman road	0.040	0.199	−0.013	−0.003	−0.013	−0.002	−0.003
	(0.028)	(0.076)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.018)
p-value joint significance river, coast, road	[<0.001]	[<0.001]	[0.744]	[0.486]	[0.745]	[0.935]	[0.488]
Royal borough	0.431				0.164	0.154	0.170
	(0.042)				(0.062)	(0.060)	(0.062)
River × royal					0.323	0.330	0.311
					(0.083)	(0.087)	(0.084)
Sea coast × royal					0.429	0.418	0.434
					(0.086)	(0.091)	(0.085)
Roman road × royal					0.212	0.234	0.201
					(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.078)
p-value joint significance interaction terms					[<0.001]	[<0.001]	[<0.001]
County fixed effects						✓	
Soil quality						✓	
Mean dependent variable	0.15	0.50	0.03	0.03	0.15	0.15	0.15
R^2	0.34	0.21	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.46	0.42
Observations	549	141	408	408	549	549	549

Notes: The table shows that boroughs at locations that favored trade were more likely to receive Farm Grants, but only in royal territories. All regressions are run at the borough level. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

[a] Entropy balancing generates weights for mesne boroughs such that the (weighted) mean and variance of the three trade geography variables (navigable river, sea coast, and Roman road) are the same as in royal boroughs. See Appendix C.1 and Hainmueller and Xu (2013) for detail.

(Post 1943; Maddicott 2016). In the second half of the thirteenth century, the Crown changed the system of extra-ordinary taxation from customarily fixed sums to proportional taxes on movable wealth that yielded larger amounts (see Section IIC).

Direct Representation of Boroughs in Parliament.—Assessing movable wealth was difficult, and it required the cooperation of local communities with royal officials. To facilitate coordination with the localities, the king summoned assemblies that included representatives from the shires (knights of the shire) and from selected boroughs, both royal and mesne (Mitchell 1951; Harriss 1975). The "Model Parliament," summoned by Edward I in 1295, reflected this extended composition. In Parliament, the Crown (i) informed lords and representatives of local communities about "cases of necessity" (e.g., imminent dangers to the realm) and the policies suggested to address these, and (ii) received information about local economic conditions from the representatives (Strayer 1941; Post 1943; Lyon 1960, p. 415). In principle, all sufficiently wealthy property owners, including those living in mesne territories, could participate in the election of their *shire* representatives (Pasquet 1964, pp. 140–43). Therefore, burgesses were represented in Parliament via their

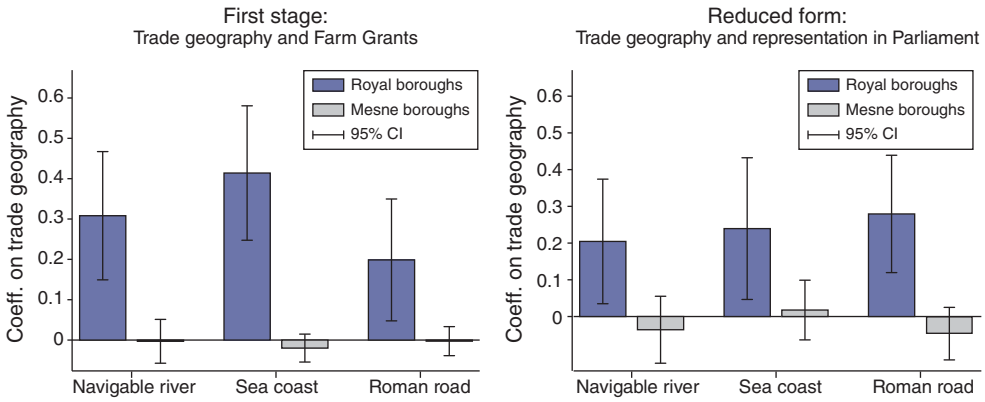

Figure 3. Illustrating the Empirical Strategy: Trade Geography in Royal versus Mesne Boroughs

Note: The left panel of the figure illustrates our first stage regression (1), with Farm Grants as dependent variable, and the right panel illustrates the reduced form, with representation in Parliament as the dependent variable. Both panels show the coefficients on the three trade geography variables for royal boroughs (i.e., the interaction term *Trade* × *Royal*) and for mesne boroughs (i.e., the coefficients on trade). We show the coefficients from the specifications that use entropy weights (column 7 in Table 1 and column 5 in Table 2), so that means and variance of the trade variables are the same for royal and mesne boroughs. Note that the depicted coefficients for royal boroughs result from adding the interaction term and the trade geography dummy in the respective tables.

knights of the shire. In addition, burgesses whose boroughs were *directly* summoned (i.e., separately from their shire) could elect their *own* MPs, giving them separate voice and ears in Parliament. We argue that Farm Grants played an important role in determining which boroughs to summon for direct representation.

Farm Grants and Direct Representation in Parliament.—Farm Grant boroughs were effectively outside the control of shire officials, and the handling of extra-ordinary taxation in these self-governing towns largely bypassed the shire administration (cf. Mitchell 1951, pp. 210–20). In the words of Tait (1936, p. 346), Farm Grants made boroughs "areas locally within but administratively outside the counties." Thus, the shire administration lacked both access to and information on local wealth. This enabled Farm Grant boroughs to effectively resist wealth assessment and tax collection.[22] In addition, in contrast to most other boroughs, Farm Grant towns had the administrative *capability* to collect extra-ordinary taxes from their burgesses. It thus made sense to directly summon representatives of administratively autonomous boroughs to Parliament in order to coordinate and facilitate "nationwide" extra-ordinary taxation (see Holdsworth 1909, p. 250; Pollard 1920, p. 112; Jolliffe 1937, pp. 323–26).[23] In other words, the administrative separation

[22] It is worth noting that Farm Grants put borough administrations not only outside the reach of the sheriff, but also of the knights of the shire, who were elected in county courts to consent and assist royal officials with the assessment and collection of extra-ordinary taxes (Pasquet 1964, pp. 186–92).

[23] In the words of Russell (1937, p. 13), in the thirteenth century: "[…] there existed many local courts […] in which hundreds of lesser folk were learning self-government. […] In the county courts and borough councils they gained experience and often handled affairs of considerable importance. […] To have excluded these men from participation in the great council would have resulted in the elimination of an exceedingly able group." This reasoning is also related to the argument by Barzell (1997) that boroughs were summoned to Parliament after receiving charters that granted autonomy and made the local burgesses the residual claimants of their revenues. On the capability

of Farm Grant boroughs contributed to them being summoned to Parliament (Rigby and Ewan 2000).[24] The link between administrative separation and parliamentary representation is also highlighted by Elton (1974, p. 41):

> […] mainly because consent to taxes was required, the Crown summoned both knights for the shires and burgesses and citizens for the towns; that is to say, the concept of communities of the realm was extended beyond the administrative divisions [i.e., the shires] to the embedded lesser units [i.e., the boroughs]. Both shires and towns were, in fact, real communities in the sense that they had self-consciousness, self-government, and self-purpose; and the composition of the House of Commons in the later middle ages quite exceptionally reflected the reality.

While summoning boroughs to Parliament was in the Crown's interest, burgesses also profited from the possibility of collective negotiations with the Crown over (i) a uniform rate of taxation and (ii) redress of common grievances (Lyon 1960, p. 385; Goldsworthy 2001, p. 29). According to McKisack (1962, pp. 77–78), "It was the interest of the burgesses to send their representatives to Westminster equipped with full powers to resist all taxes which the general opinion of the commons held to be excessive."

In sum, the historical literature has established a link between administrative autonomy (Farm Grants) and representation in Parliament. In what follows, we explore this relationship empirically.

Data on Representation in Parliament.—Beginning with the "Model Parliament" in 1295, we record the date when boroughs gained parliamentary representation. Among the 549 boroughs in our dataset, 124 attended Parliament by 1348—70 royal and 54 mesne boroughs.[25] We collect information on boroughs' parliamentary franchise from the series of volumes *History of Parliament: The House of Commons*, which covers the period from the fourteenth century to the Great Reform Act of 1832.[26]

of Farm Grant boroughs to collect extra-ordinary taxes, Mitchell (1951, p. 257) notes that "it would seem probable that the official who accounted for the farm would account for the aid [the extra-ordinary tax] of the same year."

[24] In particular, Rigby and Ewan (2000, p. 292) note, "[a]s shire officials were excluded, the scope of government in such self-governing towns was extremely broad, including the levying and expenditure of royal revenues […]. It was these self-governing royal boroughs which were most likely […] to be called upon to provide representatives at parliaments …." Crowley (1989, p. xii) in his detailed study of the county of Wiltshire explicitly points to the role of administrative separation: "the parts of Wiltshire with or formerly with systems of self-government based on burghal tenure which were outside hundredal jurisdiction [i.e., the sheriff's jurisdiction] … had been summoned to the model parliament of 1295, presumably as such."

[25] Some boroughs that were summoned to the early Parliaments were not resummoned later and/or let their franchise expire (by failing to return members for long periods of time). In our baseline analysis, we only code boroughs as parliamentary if they had attended Parliament by 1348 and were still represented in 1831. This guarantees continuity between our pre-and post-1348 analyses. In online Appendix D.12 we show that our results are nearly identical when we code also those medieval boroughs as enfranchised that subsequently lost their seats in Parliament.

[26] In particular, Roskell (1993); Bindoff (1982); Hasler (1981); Ferris and Thrush (2010); Henning (1983); Cruickshanks, Handley, and Hayton (2002); Sedgwick (1970); Namier and Brooke (1964); Thorne (1986); and Fisher (2009).

B. *Farm Grants and Representation in Parliament: Ordinary Least Squares Results*

We first establish a strong correlation between Farm Grants and direct representation of boroughs in Parliament; we then provide evidence that supports a causal interpretation, using the results from Section III to predict Farm Grants in the first stage. Our ordinary least squares (OLS) specification for boroughs being summoned to Parliament by 1348 is as follows:

$$Parliament_i = \alpha + \beta FarmGrant_i + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i, \tag{2}$$

where α is a constant term, $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a vector of control variables for borough i, and ε_i is the error term. Table 2 presents the results. Column 1 shows that there is a quantitatively large relationship in the raw data: boroughs that had received Farm Grants were 43.9 percentage points more likely to be represented in Parliament—relative to an average share of 23 percent among all boroughs. We also control for the status as royal borough; the coefficient is statistically significant but quantitatively much smaller than the one for Farm Grants. Column 2 shows that the results are almost identical when we control for county fixed effects and soil quality.

C. *Is the Link between Farm Grants and Representation in Parliament Causal?*

The historical evidence discussed above suggests a causal link between the administrative autonomy of boroughs and their representation in Parliament. To gauge causality empirically, we employ 2SLS regressions that build on the results documented above, using the interaction between trade geography and royal borough status to predict Farm Grants in the first stage.

Reduced-Form Results.—We begin by examining the corresponding reduced-form relationship, regressing parliamentary representation directly on trade-favoring geography interacted with royal borough status. Column 3 in Table 2 shows that all three interaction terms are positive and quantitatively sizable; they are also statistically significant, with a joint p-value below 0.001. Thus, among royal boroughs, trade geography is a strong predictor of representation in Parliament. This is in stark contrast to mesne boroughs, which correspond to the trade geography coefficients in levels (the noninteraction terms): each trade geography variable is quantitatively small and statistically insignificant; two of the three actually have (small) negative coefficients. Note that the standard errors are also small: we find relatively precisely estimated zero coefficients that are several standard deviations below the coefficient sizes for royal boroughs (i.e., the interaction terms). The three trade variables are also far from joint significance for mesne boroughs, with a p-value of 0.44. These nonresults provide a first check of the exclusion restriction, which requires that trade geography affected boroughs' direct representation in Parliament only via administrative autonomy (Farm Grants), but not via other channels that are associated with trade geography. Our interaction setup effectively uses mesne boroughs as a "control group," because their trade geography did not lead to Farm Grants, limiting their ability to become independent administrative units. Thus, our results suggest that trade geography

Table 2—Farm Grants and Representation in Parliament

	Indicator for boroughs summoned to Parliament by 1348							
Regression type:	OLS		Reduced form			2SLS		
Boroughs included:	All	All	All	All	All E-weights[a]	All	All	All E-weights[a]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Farm Grant 1348	0.439	0.424				0.622	0.669	0.737
	(0.065)	(0.066)				(0.174)	(0.158)	(0.174)
Royal borough	0.161	0.166	0.120	0.093	0.093	0.067	0.029	0.030
	(0.051)	(0.049)	(0.069)	(0.062)	(0.069)	(0.091)	(0.082)	(0.094)
Navigable river			−0.020	0.046	−0.036	−0.002	0.064	−0.030
			(0.050)	(0.055)	(0.046)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.040)
Sea coast			0.073	0.054	0.018	0.053	0.025	−0.020
			(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.038)
Roman road			−0.015	0.025	−0.047	0.042	0.067	0.045
			(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.039)
p-value joint significance river, coast, road			[0.435]	[0.434]	[0.367]	[0.390]	[0.135]	[0.566]
River × royal			0.224	0.268	0.240			
			(0.099)	(0.101)	(0.097)			
Sea Coast × royal			0.166	0.145	0.222			
			(0.108)	(0.111)	(0.105)			
Roman road × royal			0.295	0.299	0.326			
			(0.088)	(0.086)	(0.088)			
p-value joint significance interaction terms			[<0.001]	[<0.001]	[<0.001]			
County fixed effects		✓		✓			✓	
Soil quality		✓		✓			✓	
First stage effective *F*-stat						14.1	13.8	14.0
Mean dependent variable	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23
R^2	0.24	0.34	0.20	0.32	0.24	0.23	0.32	0.30
Observations	549	549	549	549	549	549	549	549

Notes: The table shows that boroughs with Farm Grants were significantly more likely to have seats in Parliament by 1348. All regressions are run at the borough level. Robust standard errors in parentheses. In the 2SLS specifications, the first stage uses the three interaction terms between trade geography (sea coast, navigable river, Roman roads) and royal borough status to predict Farm Grants, controlling for all variables in levels. The corresponding first-stage regressions (including all controls) are reported in columns 5–7 of Table 1. We report the first-stage effective *F*-statistic from the Montiel Olea and Pflueger (2013) robust weak instrument test; the corresponding critical value for maximum 10 percent relative bias is approximately 11.2 for all three 2SLS specifications.

[a] Entropy balancing reweights the observations in mesne boroughs to match the mean and variance of navigable river, sea coast, and Roman road in royal boroughs. See Hainmueller and Xu (2013) for details.

was not related to boroughs' representation in Parliament in the absence of Farm Grants. Column 4 adds county fixed effects to the reduced form and controls for soil quality; the results are essentially unchanged.

Our test of the exclusion restriction requires that royal and mesne boroughs are otherwise comparable. While we discuss this at length below, column 5 in Table 2 provides a first pass at the issue, using entropy weights to create balanced trade characteristics in royal and mesne boroughs. We find almost identical reduced-form results. Note also that the coefficient on royal borough status is quantitatively small and statistically insignificant. This is reassuring, as it suggests that royal borough status had a meaningful effect on parliamentary representation only via its interaction with trade geography. The right panel of Figure 3 shows the reduced-form

coefficients on trade geography for royal and mesne boroughs, illustrating our DD setup, with differences in trade geography as well as in the possibility to obtain Farm Grants (i.e., royal versus mesne). Online Appendix D.1 provides further detail and illustrations of this setup.

Second Stage Results.—Column 6 presents our baseline 2SLS specification that uses only the interaction terms of trade geography with *Royal* as instruments for Farm Grants, while including all level variables (i.e., navigable river, sea coast, Roman road, and *Royal*) as controls. The second-stage coefficient on Farm Grants is highly significant and of similar magnitude as in our OLS results. At the same time, the trade geography variables have small and insignificant coefficients (with a joint p-value of 0.39). This suggests that trade did not affect direct representation in Parliament via channels other than Farm Grants. A similar argument holds for royal borough status, which also has a small and statistically insignificant coefficient. To address potential concerns with weak instruments, we follow the recommendation by Andrews, Stock, and Sun (2019) and report the effective F-statistic by Montiel Olea and Pflueger (2013). The corresponding value of 14 is well above the rule-of-thumb threshold of 10, and above Montiel Olea and Pflueger's critical value of 11.2 for a maximal relative instrumental variable bias of 10 percent. Finally, we provide robustness checks, showing that our 2SLS results are very similar when we control for county fixed effects and soil quality (column 7), and when we use entropy balancing for mesne boroughs (column 8). Overall, our 2SLS results lend support to a causal effect of Farm Grants on boroughs' representation in Parliament, subject to the caveats that we discuss next.

D. *Identifying Assumptions and Alternative Mechanisms*

Our DD strategy hinges on royal and mesne boroughs being comparable—both in terms of the process by which they were summoned to Parliament and in terms of their economic and geographic characteristics. Regarding the former, we already discussed that extra-ordinary taxation (the main reason for summoning local communities to Parliament) followed the same procedure in royal and mesne boroughs (see Section IIC). Online Appendix B.5 provides further historical background on parliamentary representation, discussing (i) the procedural similarity of summoning royal and mesne boroughs, (ii) why numerous boroughs without Farm Grants were also summoned, and (iii) that during the late medieval period, seats in Parliament were not perceived as a highly valuable asset, so that borough wealth is unlikely to have affected enfranchisement via "buying" seats. In what follows, we complement this historical discussion, describing numerous balancing and matching exercises, as well as sample restrictions, to show that our results are not driven by different characteristics of royal and mesne boroughs. Table A.28 at the end of the online Appendix provides a summary of potential concerns with references to sections in the paper and online Appendix that address them.

Differences in Borough Wealth or Size?—While our historical discussion renders it unlikely that wealthy boroughs actively sought direct representation in Parliament, one may still be concerned about other channels related to borough

wealth. For example, it is conceivable that the king "cherry-picked" larger, wealthy towns after the Norman Conquest, and that wealth fostered both Farm Grants and the odds of being summoned to Parliament by the king. To address this issue, we use information that was available to the king when boroughs were split between royal and mesne after the Conquest: taxable wealth in 1086, as reported in the *Domesday Book* for 351 boroughs in our sample. In online Appendix D.2 we show that wealth was actually similar in royal and mesne boroughs, and that the small average difference is driven by the three richest boroughs belonging to the king. We then introduce various sample restrictions, such as excluding the top and bottom 10 percent, the top 50 percent, and even a particularly restrictive, "lopsided" sample that uses only the *poorest* 50 percent of royal boroughs and the *wealthiest* 50 percent of mesne boroughs. In all samples, we document a remarkably stable pattern for both the OLS relationship between parliamentary representation and Farm Grants and for the reduced form with trade geography. Online Appendix D.3 applies propensity score matching to create balanced "control" groups for Farm Grants boroughs. We use two different matching variables, spanning a three-century horizon: taxable wealth in 1086 and the number of taxpayers in the poll tax of 1377. The latter is a proxy for town population because all burgesses over the age of 14 (excluding beggars) were required to pay the same fixed amount. We obtain a tight overlap in the distributions of the two matching variables for Farm Grant boroughs and the "control" group (for which we use either mesne boroughs or non-Farm-Grant royal boroughs—see online Appendix Figure A.8). Throughout all specifications, we confirm the magnitude and significance of the relationship between Farm Grants and representation in Parliament. Overall, the subsample and matching results—especially for the "lopsided" wealth sample—make it very unlikely that our findings are confounded by borough wealth.

Differences Other than Wealth or Population?—We also examine whether possible differences other than borough wealth or population may drive our results. In particular, one may worry that trade geography had different effects in royal and mesne boroughs, for example because the king had more effective means to promote trade than local lords, or because the king had chosen trade locations with higher potential in the first place. We address this possibility in several ways, presenting both historical and empirical evidence that speak against it. For example, online Appendix D.4 shows that trade-favoring geography predicts economic activity and population in *both* royal and mesne territories. The same online Appendix section also addresses a related potential issue: uneven trade potential in royal versus mesne boroughs. We restrict the sample to boroughs with *identical* trade characteristics (e.g., only boroughs on a navigable river, or only boroughs that had obtained Freedom from Tolls) and then compare royal Farm Grant boroughs to matched mesne boroughs with the same wealth in 1086. Even within these highly restricted subsamples, we fully confirm our results on Farm Grants and parliamentary representation.

Sample Splits Using Domesday Boroughs.—The various exercises above have shown that our results are unlikely to be driven by differential wealth, population, or trade potential. In order to remain skeptical about our difference exercise, one would have to argue that other (unobservable) differences affected the division into

royal versus mesne boroughs, and that these differences, in turn, are also related to Farm Grants and parliamentary representation. In online Appendix D.5 we address this remaining possibility by using historical information on the 106 locations that were explicitly listed as "boroughs" in the *Domesday Book* in 1086. These boroughs were the most important economic, military, and administrative centers of the time (Brooke 1961, p. 127; Darby 1977). If the king cherry-picked royal boroughs, *Domesday* boroughs would certainly have been the most attractive targets. In online Appendix Table A.11, we show that our results on parliamentary representation hold when (i) we use only *Domesday* boroughs (62 royal and 44 mesne boroughs), (ii) when excluding all *Domesday* boroughs from the sample, (iii) and even in a particularly restrictive exercise, using only non-*Domesday* royal boroughs and *Domesday* mesne boroughs. The third exercise *excludes* the most important royal boroughs, while *including only* the most important mesne boroughs. If our findings were driven by systematic selection of royal boroughs, the correlation between Farm Grants and representation should disappear (or at least be much weaker) in this subsample. Instead, we fully confirm the magnitude and statistical significance of our main results. In addition, the sample in the third exercise is fully balanced for royal and mesne boroughs along all relevant observable characteristics (see online Appendix Table A.12). That is, we obtain balancedness without having to rely on weighting or matching techniques.

Exploiting Changes in Borough Ownership.—In online Appendix D.6 we restrict the sample to 73 boroughs that switched ownership between their foundation and 1348. The main results are visualized in online Appendix Figure A.11: among the switching boroughs with trade geography, Farm Grants were much more likely to be issued after a previously mesne borough became royal, but not for ownership switches in the opposite direction. Also, for boroughs without trade geography, ownership switches almost never led to Farm Grants, irrespective of the direction of the switch. This confirms our DD strategy based on the interaction between royal borough status and trade geography. In addition, the switching sample is balanced: switching boroughs that were royal versus mesne over the majority of time had very similar wealth and parliamentary representation. Crucially, we show that Farm Grant boroughs were much more likely to be summoned to Parliament also in this subsample. The findings from the switching sample further alleviate the concern that the initial assignment of royal versus mesne ownership after the Norman Conquest may drive our results.

Additional Results and Robustness Checks.—In online Appendix D.7 we show that our results on parliamentary representation hold within the subsample of 144 "taxation boroughs"—commercially important urban settlements (73 royal and 71 mesne) that were occasionally selected by royal assessors to pay a higher rate of extra-ordinary taxation (Willard 1933). Moreover, our results hold even in an extremely conservative subsample, where we drop all royal "taxation boroughs" while including only mesne "taxation boroughs." In online Appendix D.8 we code additional liberties that restricted the entry of royal officials into boroughs. For Farm Grant boroughs, these liberties reinforced the separation from the shire administration, making it even more difficult for the king to levy extra-ordinary

taxes without the local community's cooperation. Correspondingly, we find that a particularly large fraction (87.1 percent) of the boroughs with Farm Grants *and* restrictions on royal officials were represented in Parliament by 1348. These results lend additional support to our argument that separation from the shire administration was a crucial factor for parliamentary representation. In online Appendix D.9 we examine whether our results may be driven by (unobserved) organizational capacity. We code two types of Charters of Liberties as proxies: the right to elect officials (other than via Farm Grants) and rights to collect Murage or Pavage (funds used to repair town walls and streets). These liberties had to be petitioned and thus required burgesses to organize collective action. While both proxies are positive predictors of parliamentary representation, controlling for them does not change our results, and the coefficients on the two proxies are significantly smaller than those for Farm Grants. These results fit a broader context, in line with González de Lara, Greif, and Jha (2008): the capacity to organize and obtain liberties increased the autonomy of boroughs, with Farm Grants being the most important rights of self-administration (and thus also the strongest predictor of representation in Parliament). Online Appendix D.10 discusses that there was no "legacy of representation" from pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon assemblies (*witans*) to the English Parliament: there was no direct representation of towns before the Norman Conquest, and we also show that our results are robust to controlling for (or excluding) pre-Norman fortified towns that had occasionally sent military power holders to the *witans*. Finally, online Appendix D.11 shows that our results also hold for boroughs' representation in the "Model Parliament" of 1295.

V. Farm Grants and Institutional Outcomes after 1400

The role of Parliament in fostering cooperation between Crown, lords, and Commons varied throughout the late medieval period, but, by the sixteenth century, had become central for the purposes of lawmaking and the granting of taxes (Elton 1992, pp. 22–23; Goldsworthy 2001, p. 79).[27] The rising costs of (peace-time) government and wars—due to the Military Revolution—meant that royal income from taxation and customs was often insufficient to cover expenses. In times of crises, when the Crown was unable to build enough support in Parliament for its military and religious policies, the Crown resorted to impositions, monopolies, purveyance, militia taxes, and forced loans (Ashton 1957; Cust 1985; Bush 1991). These extra-parliamentary levies spurred resistance in the Commons (Hirst 1978; Alsop 1982; Popofsky 1990; Harriss 1993). As a result, the Crown attempted to weaken Parliament, mainly by installing friendly oligarchies in the governing councils of boroughs, and by restricting their parliamentary franchise (Clark and Slack 2007, p. 22). These attempts met with resistance from many boroughs, both inside and outside of Parliament (Bushman 1963; Plumb 1969; Patterson 2005). This process

[27] As compared to the medieval period, (i) the modus operandi of Parliament had become clearer and more formal over time (e.g., majority voting, speaker of the Commons), (ii) parliamentary legislative prerogatives expanded (Ormrod 1995; Goldsworthy 2001, p. 50), and (iii) while the primary function of Parliament was still to facilitate communication between Crown and local jurisdictions in raising extra-ordinary taxes, the need for consent by the Commons had become more formal (cf. Lyon 1960; Ormrod 1995).

culminated in the crises of the seventeenth century, which ultimately strengthened Parliament and improved the finances of the realm.

This section examines the role of Farm Grant boroughs in these national institutional dynamics.[28] We first show that towns with medieval Farm Grants continued to enjoy independent and relatively open local institutions after the fourteenth century. We then show that these towns played a key role in the gradual strengthening and modernization of the English Parliament until the Great Reform Act of 1832. We use the same regression setup as in (2), but replace the dependent variable with different institutional outcomes. The full sample size is now 600 because additional settlements received borough status after 1348; for numerous outcomes, however, the sample is smaller—for example when information is only available for parliamentary boroughs (see online Appendix A.1). We focus on OLS results to document how Farm Grant boroughs differed from other towns in the long run; to disentangle potential direct effects of trade from those of local institutions we conduct a placebo exercise at the end of this section that exploits negative shocks to boroughs' trade potential.[29] Online Appendix B.6 complements our findings with a case study of two trading towns, one royal and one mesne, that were ex ante similar but took different institutional paths.

A. *Independence and Openness of Borough Administrations in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries*

Medieval Farm Grant boroughs developed significant administrative capabilities; they typically handled their own legal disputes and selected a more commercially specialized administration. In this section, we show that Farm Grant boroughs continued to enjoy administrative independence and relatively open local institutions after the fourteenth century. We highlight three dimensions: separation from the shire administration, independence in appointing local officials, and a broad participation of townsmen in local governance.

Administrative Separation.—We begin by examining the continued administrative separation of Farm Grant boroughs from the surrounding shire. In the course of the fourteenth century, the Crown created a new office, the Justices of the Peace (JPs), whose role was to enforce the law in the localities. The JPs replaced royal itinerant justices and (partially) the sheriff, and they allowed the Crown to improve the administrative links to localities across the realm (Weinbaum 1943; Coss 1995). Commissions of JPs were set up at the shire level. The Crown granted a number

[28] Because parliamentary representation became customary over time, the vast majority of boroughs that had been summoned in medieval times kept their seats throughout the early modern period.

[29] We refrain from presenting 2SLS results for the post-1348 outcomes for two reasons: First, in contrast to Section IV on parliamentary representation pre-1348, we now have numerous, long-run outcome variables. Discussing the identifying assumptions in the historical context for each case would go beyond the scope of this paper. Second, the majority of long-run outcomes are only observed for a smaller subsample of boroughs (e.g., when we examine voting behavior in Parliament, this is only defined for parliamentary boroughs). In these subsamples, the interaction-based 2SLS typically lacks power because the trade geography interactions already predict parliamentary representation, and therefore, which boroughs are in the subsample. It is thus extremely demanding to use the same interactions again in a first stage within this subsample. However, online Appendices E.1 and E.2 present our 2SLS results for the two long-run outcome variables that are available for the full sample, confirming our OLS results.

Table 3—Independence and Openness of Borough Administrations after 1400

	Justices of the Peace (admin. separation)		Crown's influence in appointing local officials		Broad municipal election	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Farm Grant, 1348	0.383	0.392	−0.220	−0.260	0.362	0.289
	(0.065)	(0.063)	(0.124)	(0.146)	(0.118)	(0.130)
Royal borough	0.107	0.093	0.142	0.169	0.042	0.071
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.121)	(0.152)	(0.120)	(0.130)
County fixed effects		✓		✓		✓
Soil quality		✓		✓		✓
Mean dependent variable	0.15	0.15	0.39	0.39	0.56	0.56
R^2	0.21	0.30	0.02	0.25	0.15	0.50
Observations	600	600	165	165	140	140

Notes: This table shows that after the fourteenth century, boroughs with Farm Grants were more likely to be administratively separated from the surrounding shire (as captured by boroughs appointing their own JPs), that they saw significantly less influence of the king on the appointment of their local public officials, and that they had a broader participation of townsmen in electing local officials. The number of observations differ because JP grants are observed for the full sample, while the remaining dependent variables depend on data from incorporations and parliamentary boroughs, respectively. See online Appendices A.7–A.9 for detail. All regressions are run at the borough level. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

of boroughs the right to have their mayors and aldermen act as JPs within borough boundaries. According to Rigby and Ewan (2000, p. 299), "[s]uch grants, by excluding the county justices, allowed towns to defend their autonomy." We code the dummy variable *JP Grant*, which takes value one for boroughs whose local officials acted as JPs (see Appendix A.7 for detail and sources). Overall, 88 of the 600 boroughs in our post-1348 dataset obtained JP grants between 1373 and 1660. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 show that Farm Grant boroughs were almost 40 percentage points more likely to obtain JP grants (relative to a mean of 14.7 percent).

Influence of the Crown on Appointing Local Officials.—Between the fifteenth and seventeeth centuries, many boroughs acquired the status of Municipal Corporations, making them legal entities capable of owning land and issuing bylaws. Charters of Incorporation also specified the municipal governance structure, which was often used by the Crown to meddle with towns' election rules (cf. Clark and Slack 2007). Using information from the original Charters of Incorporation, we construct the dummy variable *Influence of Crown*, which takes on value one if the Crown appointed the first members of a borough's governing body right after the borough's incorporation *and* if subsequent members were selected by co-optation, thus perpetuating the initial influence of the Crown (see online Appendix A.8 for further detail on the historical context and data sources). The necessary information is available for 165 boroughs that were incorporated between 1345 and 1641; for 65 of these *Influence of Crown* takes value one. Columns 3 and 4 in Table 3 show that boroughs with Farm Grants were more than 20 percentage points less likely than other incorporated boroughs to be subject to strong influence of the Crown (relative to a mean of 39 percent).

Broad Municipal Election.—Finally, we examine the extent to which townsmen could participate in the election of the municipal governing body. Typically, local lords, royal officials, or narrow oligarchies maintained control over municipal offices (Rigby and Ewan 2000; Shaw 2005; Withington 2005, p. 9.). However, some boroughs set up a Common Council, which allowed a broader participation by freemen (burgesses enjoying trade and crafts privileges) in the selection of municipal officials (Tittler 1977; Withington 2005, p. 10; and Liddy 2017). We create a dummy variable *Broad Municipal Election* that takes value one if the borough's governing body included a Common Council and/or there is clear evidence that the wider body of townsmen participated in a borough's appointment of local officials. The variable takes value zero if burgesses' participation in municipal elections was very limited because appointments were made by a lord, royal officials, or a narrow local elite. The underlying information is from History of Parliament, so that the variable *Broad Municipal Election* can only be coded for 140 parliamentary boroughs with sufficient information (see online Appendix A.9 for detail). Columns 5 and 6 in Table 3 reveal that medieval Farm Grant boroughs were about 30 percentage points more likely to have broad municipal elections than the other parliamentary boroughs in this sample.

B. *Farm Grant Boroughs Opposing Royal Patronage*

In combination, the three outcomes in the previous subsection show that Farm Grant boroughs extended their administrative independence into the early modern period, and that townsmen enjoyed a relatively broad participation in local governance, strengthening their control over municipal affairs. This enabled them to resist the Crown's attempts to install a system of patronage in which a few local oligarchs would farm taxes and run their town's administration to both their private benefit and that of the Crown. Installing such narrow, Crown-friendly elites was arguably easier in towns that were already governed by small oligarchies, and where the Crown had influence on appointing local officials. Our results for Farm Grant boroughs complement rich historical evidence that towns with broader participation opposed a narrowing of the municipal governing body, because this would have excluded (most) townsmen from local affairs (cf. Sweet 1998). In fact, many towns legally challenged the Crown's attempt by explicitly invoking their ancient liberties (see the case of Bridport in online Appendix B.6 and the numerous additional cases discussed in online Appendix B.7). In addition, because they often shared identical charters, Farm Grant boroughs communicated and cooperated with each other to resolve common legal disputes with the Crown, often acting collectively in Parliament (see Hartrich 2019, and the historical evidence in online Appendix B.7). This suggests that Parliament was an important institution for Farm Grant boroughs to defend their liberties against the Crown, providing incentives for them to support and strengthen Parliament. This leads over to our next empirical analysis.

C. *The Civil War*

As a direct consequence of the Crown's inability to control the Commons, by 1629 Charles I no longer summoned Parliament and instead resorted to the

granting of monopolies, the sale of offices, and the use of prerogative taxation—such as Ship Money, forced loans, customs, and purveyance (Ashton 1979; Hill 1981; Root 1994, pp. 147–49). Charles also introduced highly controversial religious measures, which raised suspicions that he was reintroducing Catholicism. Subsequently, the disastrous outcome of the first Bishops' War (1639) triggered a chain of events that escalated into the English Civil War (1642–1646 and 1648–1649). In the events leading up to it, Parliament issued the *Militia Ordinance* without royal approval to raise troops in support of its cause. As a response, the king issued the *Commissions of Array* to raise his own men. The choice whether to obey the *Militia Ordinance* or the *Commissions of Array* often forced local officials, lords, and burgesses to pick a side. The parliamentary records from 1642 mention 31 boroughs whose volunteer troops (in support of parliamentarians) were sufficiently important to be explicitly discussed in Parliament. We create the dummy variable *Volunteers* for these boroughs.[30] Online Appendix A.11 presents our data sources, and online Appendix B.8 provides further historical background.

The raw numbers on volunteer troops in support of Parliament reveal a stark difference: among the boroughs with medieval Farm Grants, 22 percent raised volunteers, while less than 2 percent of all other boroughs did so. Table 4 presents the corresponding regression results. We begin with the full sample in columns 1 and 2. We find that boroughs with medieval Farm Grants were about 16 percentage points more likely to raise pro-parliamentarian troops, relative to a sample mean of 4.5 percent. Because incentives to support Parliament may have been larger for represented boroughs, we next restrict the sample to the 182 boroughs in our dataset that had seats in Parliament by 1640. The coefficient on Farm Grants is almost identical to the full sample (columns 3 and 4).

Why were volunteer troops more likely to form in Farm Grant boroughs? These boroughs had a natural interest in a strong Parliament because it enabled them to collectively negotiate taxation with the Crown. A weakening of Parliament would also have jeopardized towns' liberties by making them vulnerable to royal interferences (see Section VB). In addition, the administrative autonomy of Farm Grant boroughs *enabled* them to organize military action against the king (cf. Lindley 1992; Forster 2000; Hillmann 2008).

D. *Voting Rights in MP Elections*

During the early years of Parliament, enfranchised boroughs had elected their MPs with broad participation: until the fourteenth century, in principle all male householders doing "watch and ward" (i.e., participating in the local system of peacekeeping) were entitled to vote (Porritt 1909, p. 5). During the subsequent

[30] At the same time, many towns were reluctant to openly fight the king, since their liberties could have been revoked by the Crown in case of defeat. This ambivalence may in part explain why burgesses were divided during the Civil War, even within boroughs (Howell 1979, 1982). In addition, previous research has shown that individual MPs often followed their private interests (such as overseas stock holdings or personal monopolies issued by the king) when deciding to support the king or parliamentarians during the Civil War (Jha 2015). This often led to MPs from the same borough supporting opposite sides: among the 194 boroughs with more than one MP, 80 saw split support (we are grateful to Saumitra Jha for sharing his data with us). On boroughs' split support, see also Withington (2005, pp. 41–42). Consequently, individual MP behavior is not a strong indicator for *borough*-level preferences during the Civil War.

Table 4—Support for Parliamentarians during the Civil War

Volunteer troops raised by borough in 1642				
			Parliamentary boroughs	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Farm Grant, 1348	0.169	0.162	0.163	0.210
	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.061)	(0.069)
Royal borough	0.043	0.039	0.054	−0.024
	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.047)	(0.070)
County fixed effects		✓		✓
Soil quality		✓		✓
Mean dependent variable	0.045	0.045	0.132	0.132
R^2	0.12	0.21	0.08	0.36
Observations	600	600	182	182

Notes: The table shows that boroughs with medieval Farm Grants were significantly more likely to raise pro-parliamentary volunteer troops at the beginning of the Civil War in 1642. The subsample in columns 3 and 4 includes only boroughs that were represented in Parliament in 1640. All regressions are run at the borough level. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

centuries, the franchise narrowed due to growing patronage—the ability to nominate and control MPs by the Crown and his allied landed elites (Porritt 1909, p. 371). Yet, numerous boroughs resisted patronage and maintained relatively open franchises in which freeholders and freemen also had a voice (Pollard 1920, pp. 164–65; Kishlansky 1986, chap. 6 and p. 228). We show that boroughs with medieval Farm Grants had wider franchise rules until the nineteenth century, and that their MP elections were less subject to patronage.

We first present results for 1820–1831—the period with the most complete data. We then study earlier periods, going back to the early seventeenth century. We use several indicators for broad voting rights over the period 1820–1831: (i) *Openness Index*: an index from 1 to 3 for how "open" MP elections were for candidates to run—the extent to which a borough's choice of MP candidates was subject to the control of a patron; (ii) *Contested Elections*: the number of contested elections (out of a total of four) over the period 1820–1831, i.e., MP elections for which there were more candidates than seats for a borough; (iii) *Broad Franchise*: a dummy variable that takes on value 0 if the borough had a "narrow franchise" where the right to vote for MPs was attached to land holdings or titles, and value 1 otherwise—this variable reflects the breadth of the electorate that voted for MPs; (iv) *Patronage Index*: this index ranges from 0 (closed constituency, controlled by a local patron) to 2 (open constituency without patronage). The third and fourth variables are from Aidt and Franck (2015). All four variables are coded such that higher values indicate MP elections with broader voting rights; online Appendix A.10 provides further detail. All regressions use only the subset of 184 boroughs from our dataset that had seats in Parliament in 1820–1831 and for which data are available.

Results for 1820–1831.—Columns 1–4 of Table 5 show that medieval Farm Grants are a strong predictor of all four indicators for broader voting rights, accounting for about one-third of the average of the various measures. In columns 5–7, we combine the four measures into their first principal component and run a number

Table 5—Openness of MP Elections at the Borough Level in the 1820s

	Various indicators for openness, 1820–1831						
	Openness index	Contested elections	Broad franchise	Patronage index	First principal component of columns 1–4		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Farm Grant, 1348	0.378	0.642	0.197	0.437	0.669	0.657	0.529
	(0.112)	(0.207)	(0.066)	(0.099)	(0.149)	(0.149)	(0.164)
Additional controls[a]						✓	✓
County fixed effects							✓
Soil quality							✓
Mean dependent variable	1.54	1.36	0.69	0.92	— [Mean 0, SD 1] —		
R^2	0.07	0.05	0.04	0.09	0.10	0.16	0.41
Observations	183	183	183	183	183	183	183

Notes: This table shows that medieval Farm Grants are a strong predictor of more open borough-level elections of MPs in the 1820s. All regressions are run at the borough level.

[a] Additional controls include the following variables constructed by Aidt and Franck (2015): market integration (travel distance between any given constituency and all other 243 constituencies in their sample, weighted by the population); distance to urban center (travel days from each constituency to the nearest of the 13 largest towns in 1831); connection to London (geographical, economic, and informational connections to London).

of additional checks. Column 5 shows a strong positive coefficient on Farm Grants, corresponding to 0.67 standard deviations of the dependent variable. In column 6 we include several controls used by Aidt and Franck (2015) for the same period.[31] In column 7 we add county fixed effects and soil quality. All specifications yield highly significant coefficients of similar magnitude.

Results for 1604–1831.—In online Appendix E.3 we show that the relationship between Farm Grants and broader voting rights in MP elections holds with continuity between the early seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The available historical sources allow us to extend the *Openness* measure back to 1690, and the *Broad Franchise* measure back to 1604. Throughout the various time periods, we find that among the boroughs that were represented in Parliament, those with medieval Farm Grants were significantly more open in terms of nominating candidates for MP seats (online Appendix Table A.20), and had a broader electorate that voted for MP candidates (online Appendix Table A.21).

What explains the positive relationship between Farm Grants and broad parliamentary franchise rules in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries? In accordance with our reasoning in Section VA, the broad elites in Farm Grant boroughs had strong incentives to oppose restrictions of their voting franchise. This is also supported by Sweet (1998, p. 84), who observes that in many boroughs ancient charters (e.g., Farm Grants) had fostered a "*civic ideology of independence*" and were used

[31] We thank Toke Aidt and Raphaël Franck for kindly sharing their data. The controls include market integration (travel distance between any given constituency and the 243 other constituencies weighted by the population), distance to urban center (travel days from each constituency to the nearest of the 13 largest towns in 1831), and connection to London (geographical, economic, and informational connections to London). Aidt and Franck (2015) also control for borough population. Since this is an endogenous outcome of commercial activity (see online Appendix Table A.9), we do not include this variable. We also drop royal borough status from our set of core controls because the medieval distinction between royal and mesne boroughs lost relevance throughout the early modern period and became obsolete after the seventeenth century (Cam 1940; Tittler 1977). If we do include the *Royal* dummy, it is small and statistically insignificant.

as legal arguments against attempts to restrict the franchise during the eighteenth century. In addition, Farm Grant boroughs' administrative independence greatly diminished the ability of the Crown and other landed patrons to meddle with MP elections (cf. Houghton 1966).

E. *The Great Reform Act of 1832*

Despite the progressing industrialization of England, the rules governing Parliament and its composition remained largely unchanged after the seventeenth century (Porritt 1909). As a result, the beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by profound discontent with local governance and MP elections (Lizzeri and Persico 2004). Many newly industrialized boroughs lacked direct representation (e.g., Manchester), which also led industrialists and financiers to "buy" seats in Parliament, typically from "rotten" boroughs. Moreover, franchise rules were open to manipulations, for instance through the creation of nonresident voters (Salmon 2005). Consequently, the parliamentary system was perceived as corrupt (Brock 1973, pp. 25–28). The Great Reform Act of 1832—a milestone towards the modernization and democratization of Parliament—addressed these issues by implementing major changes: (i) disenfranchising smaller rotten boroughs, while enfranchising the newly industrialized ones, and (ii) implementing a virtually uniform franchise across boroughs based on property and residency requirements. These measures resulted in an extension of the franchise from 3 percent to more than 6 percent of the population.

The first bill for the Great Reform Act was proposed in March 1831. Although approved by the House of Commons by a narrow margin, it was then rejected by the House of Lords. This event prompted the collapse of the government and new MP elections (held in April 1831). Importantly, the MPs that voted in March 1831 had been appointed by their constituencies to vote on a variety of other major issues such as Catholic emancipation, slavery, and the Corn Laws (Fisher 2009; Brock 1973). In contrast, the general elections of April 1831 were effectively a referendum on the parliamentary reform, closely tying MPs to their constituencies' preferences on the Reform Act. A new bill for the Reform Act was voted in December 1831 and finally approved in March 1832. Online Appendix B.9 provides further historical detail.

We focus on the two voting rounds on the Reform Act in March and December 1831. For these two voting rounds, we record the voting behavior of each borough's MPs from the Parliamentary Papers (available at https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers) and compute the share of votes in favor of the Reform Act. We also record whether the borough was to be totally or partially disenfranchised ("Section A and B boroughs"). In addition, we control for borough-level characteristics and a dummy for whether a borough was located in proximity to the peasants' Swing Riots (as coded by Aidt and Franck 2015).

Table 6 presents our empirical results. The first two columns show that there is essentially no relationship between Farm Grants and pro-Reform votes in March 1831, i.e., for the vote by MPs who had been elected based on other issues, before the Reform Act became the major topic. Next, we focus on the decisive vote in December 1831, when MPs had been specifically appointed to vote on the Reform Act, so that their mandate was closely tied to their borough's preferences on

Table 6—Boroughs' MP Votes Supporting the Great Reform Act

Share of votes in favor of the Reform Act in March and December, 1831						
Vote in:	March 1831		December 1831			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Farm Grant 1348	0.033	0.022	0.162	0.120	0.116	0.108
	(0.062)	(0.069)	(0.070)	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.064)
Disenfranchise	−0.300	−0.266	−0.316	−0.168	−0.163	−0.187
	(0.059)	(0.077)	(0.073)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.073)
Share pro-Reform Act votes March 1831				0.756	0.752	0.762
				(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.070)
Swing Riot within ten kilometers					0.108	0.113
					(0.052)	(0.100)
County fixed effects		✓				✓
Soil quality		✓				✓
Additional controls[a]		✓				✓
Mean dependent variable	0.46	0.46	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.55
R^2	0.14	0.40	0.17	0.57	0.58	0.65
Observations	175	175	175	175	175	175

Notes: This table shows that medieval Farm Grants are a strong predictor of voting behavior of MPs in favor of the Great Reform Act in the decisive vote of December 1831. The earlier vote in March 1831 serves as a placebo, as explained in the text. All regressions are run at the borough level. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

[a]Additional controls include market integration, distance to urban center, and connection to London (see notes to Table 5 for detail).

parliamentary reform. Column 3 shows that medieval Farm Grants are a strong predictor of voting behavior of MPs. The coefficient is also quantitatively important: support was about 16 percentage points higher among Farm Grant boroughs, relative to an average level of support of 55 percent among the boroughs with representatives in Parliament in 1831. We also control for whether a borough was to be disenfranchised; as expected, the coefficient is strongly negative. In column 4 we also control for the vote in March 1831. Thus, we effectively exploit the *change* in voting behavior after the newly appointed MPs were closely tied to their borough's preferences on the reform. This specification implicitly controls for unobserved political preferences that were already reflected in the appointment of the MPs that had voted in March. While the coefficient on the March vote is large and significant, the coefficient on Farm Grants remains quantitatively similar and statistically significant. This suggests that omitted variables related to other political preferences do not drive our results. Column 5 adds a control for whether a borough was located in proximity to rural Swing Riots and thus felt a "threat of revolution" (Aidt and Franck 2015). The coefficient is similar to the one on Farm Grants. Finally, column 7 shows that our results hold also when we add county fixed effects and additional controls for borough characteristics.

In online Appendix E.4 we examine the voting behavior of *individual* MPs (as opposed to vote *shares* for each borough). We find that (i) the change in pro-Reform-Act votes was entirely driven by newly appointed MPs—among the 190 borough MPs who were confirmed after their March vote, 189 cast the same vote again in December 1831; (ii) Farm Grant boroughs were much more likely to replace MPs who had voted "no" on the Reform Act; (iii) newly elected MPs in Farm Grant boroughs were significantly more likely to vote pro-Reform Act in

December 1831 than MPs from non-Farm-Grant boroughs (both confirmed and replaced). Thus, the increase in support for the Reform Act in Farm Grant boroughs was largely due to the replacement of opponents with supporters after the March 1831 vote in Parliament. A back-of-the envelope calculation in online Appendix E.4 suggests that this mattered quantitatively: about 40 percent of the increase in support for the Reform Act among borough MPs between March and December 1831 is explained by Farm Grant boroughs.

What explains the higher support for the Great Reform Act by boroughs that had received Farm Grants in medieval times? The change in the franchise rules affected boroughs with closed and open voting rights in different ways. In boroughs with a narrow franchise, the reform resulted in broader voting rights, thereby making patronage costly and largely unfeasible. This was not in the interest of the narrow elites running these boroughs. In contrast, in boroughs with a history of relatively open franchises—i.e., Farm Grant boroughs—the reform further strengthened the franchise against royal meddling and manipulations. Thus, the broader elites within these boroughs had a natural interest in supporting the reform to curtail patronage within their own boroughs, and—more generally—bolster the representativeness and legitimacy of Parliament via the reform's effect on other boroughs (see Section VD and Lizzeri and Persico 2004).

F. *Evidence on the Mechanism Using Obstructions to Trade*

We have documented that self-governing medieval towns had more open local institutions and supported Parliament in subsequent centuries. While this finding in itself is important, the underlying mechanism is of interest for its political economy implications. In particular, one may ask whether trade affected long-run institutional outcomes directly, and not only via medieval self-governance. For representation in Parliament we have addressed this concern by using mesne boroughs as a "placebo." For our long-run outcomes, there are limitations to this approach (see footnote 28). We now provide an additional placebo exercise, showing that Farm Grants predict long-run institutional outcomes after 1348 even in the absence of trade.

We code an indicator for boroughs in which exogenous shocks obstructed trade *after* they had received Farm Grants. We focus on two types of shocks to transportation infrastructure: first, natural disasters—the silting up or destruction of harbors located on the sea coast (in the spirit of Jha 2013), and second, the obstructions of parts of navigable rivers due to watermills (and the associated milldams) that were erected upstream or downstream of boroughs. Particularly severe shocks or obstructions to trade triggered petitions by burgesses asking for subsidies for repairs or tax reductions. Nevertheless, these obstructions often proved irreversible (Clark and Slack 2007, p. 7). Information on these petitions is available from the History of Parliament. Among the 84 boroughs with medieval Farm Grants in our regression dataset, 15 suffered trade obstructions between the thirteenth and seventeen centuries—all occurred *after* these boroughs had received a Farm Grant. Online Appendix E.5 provides further historical background and information on sources.

In Table 7 we split boroughs with medieval Farm Grants into those with and without trade obstructions. Panel A performs a plausibility check: columns 1–3 show that in medieval times (i.e., before trade was obstructed), both Farm Grant

Table 7—Obstructions to Trade after Farm Grants

	Pre-1400 outcomes			Post-1400 outcomes		
	ln(taxable wealth in 1086)	ln(poll tax payers in 1377)	Commercial importance 14C[a]	ln(population in 17C)	Trade employment share in 1831	ln(Population in 1851)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A. Plausibility checks						
Trade not obstructed after Farm Grant	0.672	1.490	1.502	1.028	0.087	0.932
	(0.219)	(0.213)	(0.179)	(0.155)	(0.021)	(0.199)
Trade obstructed after Farm Grant	1.091	1.144	1.511	0.154	0.008	0.168
	(0.367)	(0.613)	(0.314)	(0.294)	(0.036)	(0.296)
p-value: test for equality of coefficients	[0.314]	[0.587]	[0.981]	[0.008]	[0.038]	[0.027]
Mean dependent variable	1.69	5.80	[SD = 1]	6.84	0.38	9.01
R^2	0.05	0.27	0.29	0.16	0.09	0.13
Observations	351	154	549	425	183	230

	Justices of the Peace	Crown's influence on appointments	Broad municipal elections	Volunteer troops during Civil War	Openness of MP elections 1820–1831[b]	Vote share for Great Reform Act 1832
Panel B. Long-run institutional outcomes						
Trade not obstructed after Farm Grant	0.476	−0.117	0.358	0.218	0.724	0.261
	(0.062)	(0.083)	(0.085)	(0.052)	(0.171)	(0.073)
Trade obstructed after Farm Grant	0.383	−0.104	0.519	0.116	0.484	0.255
	(0.130)	(0.146)	(0.097)	(0.088)	(0.202)	(0.130)
p-value: test for equality of coefficients	[0.518]	[0.930]	[0.122]	[0.318]	[0.307]	[0.966]
Mean dependent variable	0.15	0.39	0.56	0.04	[SD = 1]	0.55
R^2	0.20	0.01	0.16	0.12	0.11	0.07
Observations	600	165	140	600	183	175

Notes: The table exploits obstructions to trade (after boroughs received Farm Grants) by exogenous events such as silting of rivers and harbors, or the construction of watermills up/downstream. Panel A provides plausibility checks, showing that before 1400, Farm Grant boroughs with and without (future) obstructions had similar trade-related outcomes, while after 1400, these outcomes differ. Panel B presents suggestive evidence that Farm Grants affected the long-run institutional outcomes from Tables 3 to 6 even when trade was obstructed. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

[a]First principle component of two indicators for commercial importance: "Freedom from Tolls" (a grant of liberty that exempted a borough's burgesses from tolls throughout the realm) and an indicator variable for whether a borough was a commercial hub during the fourteenth century, based on Masschaele (1997). The variable has mean zero and standard deviation one.

[b]First principle component of the four proxies for open MP elections used in Table 5. The variable has mean zero and standard deviation one.

boroughs with and without (later) trade obstructions had higher taxable wealth, poll tax payers (a proxy for population), and commercial importance in the fourteenth century (see online Appendix A.6 for sources and coding). The coefficient sizes for the two types of Farm Grant boroughs are statistically indistinguishable. In contrast, in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (columns 4–6), only Farm Grants without trade obstructions predict borough population and commercial employment, and the coefficients are significantly different with p-values below 0.05. In other words, boroughs that later suffered trade obstructions started off with very similar wealth and commercial activity as all other Farm Grant boroughs, but they lost their lead in the centuries after their trade was obstructed. Thus, if trade had a direct effect on long-run institutional outcomes, this channel should be switched off in those boroughs.

Panel B in Table 7 re-examines our long-run outcomes from Tables 3 to 6. We find similar, statistically indistinguishable coefficients for Farm Grant boroughs with and without trade obstructions. In addition, the coefficients for the two categories are individually statistically significant for most outcomes—despite the fact that there are relatively few boroughs with trade obstructions. These results make it unlikely that trade-related unobservables confound our long-run results. In combination with the historical evidence discussed above, the most plausible mechanism for our long-run results is that the experience of self-governance itself shaped the political behavior of towns, with important implications for "national" institutional outcomes.

G. *Robustness of Long-Run Results: Matching, Spatial Correlation, Taxable Wealth*

In the online Appendix, we perform a number of robustness checks of our results for the various outcome variables from Tables 2 to 6. In online Appendix E.6 we account for possible spatial dependence of error terms and control for distance to London. Online Appendix E.7 controls for taxable wealth in 1086, and online Appendix E.8 provides particularly restrictive matching estimates, comparing only boroughs with exactly the same trade geography. We confirm our results both in terms of magnitude and statistical significance.

VI. Taking Stock: Municipal Liberties and Assemblies in Western Europe

To what extent were the dynamics described in Sections III to V relevant in other regions of Western Europe? In this section, we present an overview of the institutional dynamics of France, Spain, the Low Countries, the Holy Roman Empire (Germany), Northern Italy, and Sicily, and compare them to the case of England. Online Appendix F provides additional historical background.

We distinguish between two channels: first, the "merchant towns entering parliament" channel (rulers delegating administrative control of merchant towns to townsmen and summoning these towns to parliaments); and second, the "strengthening Parliament" channel (municipal institutions of self-governing towns and nationwide institutions complementing each other in resisting patronage by the Crown and landed elites). We document that elements of the first channel were at play throughout Western Europe—albeit to a varying degree, depending on monarchs' administrative control over their territories. Compared to Continental Europe, post-Norman Conquest England was unique in the firm control that the Crown exerted over lords, towns, and the territory more generally (Root 1994; Epstein 2000; North et al. 2009). These differences in initial conditions can shed light on the emergence of municipal institutions and—via the second channel—on the effectiveness of parliaments in coordinating autonomous towns during the crises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This, in turn, can help to explain the institutional divergence between England and most of Continental Europe by the end of the seventeenth century (cf. Van Zanden, Buringh, and Bosker 2012; Prak 2018).

Merchant Towns Entering Parliament.—In both France and Spain, following the Commercial Revolution, monarchs granted some administrative autonomy to

merchant towns and summoned them to regional and general assemblies during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. As Procter (1980, p. 161) points out, in thirteenth century León and Castile, the royal "cities and towns summoned to send representatives to the cortes were only those [...] which had an autonomous municipal organization and jurisdiction over the surrounding tierra." The monarchs, however, were still in the process of consolidating their territories and therefore enjoyed less military and administrative control, as compared to their English counterpart (Barzel and Kiser 1997). The power of the local landed and military nobility in France and Spain prevented merchants from gaining full control of municipal offices (Sanz 1994; Ladero Quesada 1994; Hilton 1995, pp. 88–92). In the words of Hilton (1995, p. 101), the "predominance of mercantile interests in the late medieval English towns is not found, for the most part, in French towns." Urban communities could gain autonomy—and subsequently access to parliaments—because of their military strength (e.g., the *communes*) and/or that of their elites (Petit-Dutaillis 1947; Grafe 2012). Monarchs supported these elites' control over municipal offices as a way to distribute rents and ensure their loyalty; see the reasoning in North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009). The bilateral deals between local elites and the Crown created an environment of heterogeneous interests that undermined the functioning of central assemblies (Strayer and Taylor 1939; Root 1994; Barzel and Kiser 1997; Major 1980, pp. 12–15). Similar dynamics were at work in Sicily, where the local lords were very strong relative to the Crown. Because lords controlled relatively small territories, towns rarely obtained administrative autonomy, which stifled merchants' representation in general assemblies.

The Holy Roman Empire (roughly, Germany), consisted of a plethora of heterogeneous statelets—each ruled by princes and bishops—that were under the formal authority of the emperor. During the Commercial Revolution, *imperial* cities and *free* towns acquired a large degree of autonomy by taking advantage of the weak central authority (Jacob 2010). Urban governance was in the hands of nobles, wealthy merchants, and craft guilds (Ribhegge 2003). Representative assemblies emerged both at the imperial level and within the princely territories. By the fifteenth century, imperial cities and free towns joined nobles and clergy in the imperial *diets*. The composition of the *diets* fluctuated over time, and they were less effective than the English Parliament at coordinating autonomous towns across the realm (Prak 2018). As a result, towns played only a minor role in decision-making, and some formed competing urban leagues, with limited success (Moraw 1989; Isenmann 1999; Chilosi and Volckart 2011). Northern Italy—nominally subject to the Holy Roman emperor—experienced similar dynamics. An important difference with the German territories was Northern Italy's high rate of urbanization, which allowed militarily and commercially strong cities to become *fully* independent by the twelfth century (Prak 2018). However, unlike imperial cities, Northern Italian city-states did not gather in the assemblies of the Empire (Blockmans 1978).

The Low Countries were a highly urbanized area made up of semi-autonomous provinces governed by territorial lords (e.g., counts). Town elites were not only commercially but also militarily strong, and they occasionally challenged the lords (Van Steensel 2012). In Flanders, the main towns (the *Trois Villes*) gained jurisdiction over their surrounding territory and dominated provincial assemblies, through which they collectively negotiated taxes with the count. Urban governance was

shared by wealthy merchants, craft guilds, and appointees of the count (Blockmans 1978; Nicholas 1992; Derville 1996). In the other Dutch provinces, territorial lords had more control over the process by which towns (i) gained self-governance and (ii) were included in provincial assemblies (Van Zanden and Prak 2006; Prak 2018). In the fifteenth century, all the provinces came under the lordship of the Duke of Burgundy (and later the Habsburgs), and the Estates General were established to facilitate coordination among provinces. The new rulers implemented a strong central bureaucracy, curbing towns' jurisdictions. This led to resistance, especially in Flanders, where the Habsburgs subdued the rebel cities and curtailed their autonomy by the end of the fifteenth century (Nicholas 1992; Stein 2017).

We conclude that the "merchant towns entering parliament" channel operated in most of Western Europe. The crucial difference lay in the extent to which this process was under the control of territorial lords. At one extreme, Northern Italy displayed the lowest degree of control by the ruler, resulting in the formation of independent city-states. At the other extreme, the English Crown controlled the process of granting towns autonomy. This centralized and fairly uniform setting promoted the coordination of towns in a relatively well-functioning parliament (Elton 1974, p. 50).[32] Spain, France, Sicily, Germany and the Low Countries all lay in between these two extremes. With the exception of the Low Countries, the weaker degree of control exerted by overlords eventually hampered the effectiveness of general assemblies.

Self-Governed Towns Strengthening Parliaments.—All over Europe, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were characterized by monarchs' recurrent attempts to impose higher taxes to finance the increased cost of warfare (Major 1980, p. 203). Regional and "national" assemblies, whose elites became divided also along religious lines, tried to resist these demands (Russell 1982). Monarchs sought to circumvent this opposition by establishing patron-client networks with the local nobility and town oligarchies, giving them lucrative positions as tax farmers in exchange for their loyalty, credit, and military support.

This system of patronage was successfully installed in the dominions of the French and Spanish Crowns (which included Sicily), where local landed and military elites were relatively strong (Mack Smith 1968; Kettering 1986; Root 1994; Kwass 2006; Irigoin and Grafe 2008; Grafe 2012). These strong local elites had also weakened "national" assemblies since their inception—e.g., by resisting the implementation of a uniform system of direct taxation (cf. Barzel and Kiser 1997; Grafe 2012). In contrast to England, the elites' bilateral deals with the Crown led to a system in which different towns paid different tax rates (Irigoin and Grafe 2008). This created incentives to seek individual favors rather than coordinating tax policy with other towns. The nobility increasingly monopolized towns' local governments (alongside royal officials), and France and Spain converged towards "absolutism"—effectively a system of tax farming of the predominantly indirect taxes, with local

[32] The English Parliament differed from its Continental counterparts in several respects, which may have contributed to its relative effectiveness. For example, Elton highlights the role played by the shire system of representation: "The House of Commons was representative in theory because [...] the shire organization was general and uniform, and because so many towns were summoned" (Elton 1974, p. 41).

oligarchies shifting the burden of taxation onto the poorer strata of the population (Major 1980). Because both the king and the towns' closed oligarchies benefited from this "tax agreement," representative assemblies became obsolete and tended to disappear (Jago 1981; Beik 2005). This reliance on individual deals hampered the coordination of taxation across the realm. As a result, the overall ability to raise funds was lower relative to England's parliamentary system. According to Root (1994), in France, the absence of a central assembly in which the elites could peacefully negotiate property rights paved the way to the revolution.

Similar institutional dynamics occurred in the Holy Roman Empire. Since towns had little weight in representative assemblies, their ability to resist patronage was limited. The emperor sold numerous imperial cities to territorial princes in exchange for military support during the war-torn sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These cities lost part of their autonomy in the process, as did *territorial* towns more generally (Moraw 1989; Isenmann 1999). Urban administrations often came under the control of narrow oligarchies (Liebel 1965; Wahl 2019).[33] Eventually, the imperial *diets* lost importance, limiting coordination not only across cities but also across the territorial Estates. Northern Italian city-states also experienced a significant increase in warfare in the early modern period. The mounting fiscal pressure exacerbated internal conflicts, starting a process of oligarchization whereby elites in many towns appointed military chiefs who eventually became hereditary lords (*signori*) of the city (Ventura 1979; Prak 2018). The rise of the *signoria* put Northern Italy on a path of regional state formation similar to that described for the German principalities (Chittolini 1979).

In the Low Countries, provincial Estates were largely in control of extra-ordinary taxation by the sixteenth century. The Habsburgs sought to alter the existing balance of power by diminishing towns' autonomy, ending the Estates General, and appointing allies to key offices in charge of taxation and religious policies (De Schepper 1994; Tracy 2008). The provincial Estates reacted by organizing a rebellion. The northern provinces—whose town merchant elites dominated well-functioning provincial Estates (Israel 1995; Tracy 1990; Van Steensel 2012)—achieved full autonomy. These provinces founded the Dutch Republic, a parliamentary regime that differed from the English system in the strength of the provincial Estates relative to both the Estates General and the *stadtholder* (Prak 2018). Flanders, by contrast, failed to gain independence. Some scholars have blamed this outcome on the tight control of the Habsburgs and the local nobility over municipal offices and on frictions inside the Flemish provincial assembly after the failed urban rebellions of the late fifteenth century (Israel 1995; Marnef 2001; Prak 2018; Baguet 2019). Flemish Estates continued to exist, but did not develop further prerogatives.

In England, the local nobility and the towns had little military power; nobles were not exempt from extra-ordinary taxation, and towns did not strike individual deals with the Crown (Major 1980, p. 199; Hilton 1995, p. 53). In contrast to France and Spain, relatively broad and open elites governed English towns—

[33] However, the need to finance wars also created opportunities for broader participation in *local* institutions. In line with our mechanism, Becker et al. (2020) show that German lords involved in defensive wars were more likely to open municipal administrations to townsmen, which led to more sophisticated taxation. The crucial dimension that lacked, however, was the ability for towns across the realm to coordinate effectively in a general assembly.

especially those with medieval Farm Grants (Rigby and Ewan 2000). These elites could rely on their municipal institutions and—unlike France, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and Flanders—on their presence in a well-established parliament to protect their independence from the Crown and local patrons. Self-governing towns actively contributed to strengthening Parliament during the seventeenth century. This reinforcing interaction between local and nationwide institutions also operated in the provinces that would evolve into the Dutch Republic, where, similar to the case of England, self-governing towns were included in relatively effective provincial assemblies during the late Middle Ages.

VII. Conclusion

We have documented an important interaction between municipal self-governance and national representative institutions over the course of several centuries. We began by explaining how the Commercial Revolution led to the emergence of self-governing towns in England and more broadly in Western Europe, to accommodate the need for a more specialized administration. While municipal self-governance allowed for significant efficiency gains due to an "exceedingly able group" of local administrators (Russell 1937, p. 13), it also limited rulers' ability to assess local wealth and enforce tax collection without the cooperation of local communities. Consequently, monarchs often called autonomous towns to parliaments where taxation was negotiated and coordinated with other stakeholders.

The local elites that governed autonomous towns differed across Europe. In England, the Norman Conquest had created a relatively homogeneous environment with a strong central authority and militarily weak elites in towns. In this political landscape, the emerging autonomous towns were predominantly governed by a relatively broad merchant class, whose administrative control over municipal institutions was an important stepping stone for their ascent to the "coalition of power holders." In contrast, in most of Continental Europe, monarchs had weaker control over their territories at the time of the Commercial Revolution. Relatively narrow local landed and military elites had a strong influence on municipal institutions. We argue that these differences in local governing bodies mattered for the evolution of "national" institutions throughout the subsequent centuries.

By the sixteenth century, the increasing need for royal revenues (e.g., to finance wars) led to frequent clashes with parliaments throughout Europe. Monarchs attempted to weaken parliamentary resistance by cooperating with friendly local oligarchies and strengthening their hold over towns. The French and the Spanish Crowns managed to circumvent parliaments by entering bilateral deals with these narrow elites, whereby the latter "farmed" taxes from which they were themselves largely exempt: in seventeenth century France, "society took the form of a late, recharged feudalism" (Beik 2005). In England, in contrast, the relatively broad governing bodies of autonomous merchant towns resisted attempts of royal interference. Parliament was vital in this power struggle because it allowed the self-governing entities to coordinate in defending their municipal liberties. Self-governed towns also had a natural interest in a strong Parliament because it ensured their ability to *collectively* negotiate taxation with the monarch. This inhibited the rise of patronage with its dispersed individual tax arrangements and favors.

An important insight of our study is that municipal self-governance in the hands of broad groups with aligned interests throughout the realm—in combination with a venue for them to coordinate (Parliament)—can impose significant constraints on central rulers. In England, self-governing merchant towns contributed to successfully opposing the trend towards patronage, strengthening Parliament and constraining the power of the Crown. Our results can thus help to explain the institutional divergence between most of Continental Europe and England over the early modern period (Van Zanden et al. 2012).

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